LIBRARY REDEEMER COLLEGE
777 GARNER RD E
ANCASTER ON L9K 1J4
Dec08

PM# 40009999 R9375

CHRISTIAN COURIER

REDEEMER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LIBRARY
CHRISTIAN COURIER AUG 0 5 2008
PER/BX/9401/.C36

July 28, 2008 No. 2845 $2.00

The offensive Gospel ...p.14

Life cycles ...p.12

62nd year of publication

Turn-around in Colombia?

Harry der Nederlanden

The sensational rescue of 15 hostages from a rebel camp in Colombia this summer is good news for more than those who were freed. It is a signal of hope for Colombians. The country has long been the most violent in Latin America. The so-called Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have exercised control in large areas of the countryside and even in some cities, terrorizing anyone it suspected of government sympathies. Right-wing death squads, on the other hand, terrorized those suspected of cooperating with the rebels.

Drug lords and gangs took advantage of the breakdown in law and order, and for some time it looked as if the country were about to disintegrate into chaos. The murder rate verged on 30,000 per year. Kidnappings became an almost daily occurrence. Pastors and priests were often targeted to extort ransom from their congregations. Judges and other officials were assassinated, and even police stations came under attack.

To most Colombians, weary of the violence that has gripped their country for over 40 years, the blow struck against the FARC symbolizes the headway that is gradually being made to restore law and order to the country.

Although the FARC has been dealt some hard blows with the deaths of some of its most prominent leaders, it is far from dead. It still counts an estimated 9,000 tough, experienced soldiers (down from an estimated 17,000). But, aided by the US, the government of Alvaro Uribe has had considerable success with its three-pronged strategy: it has maintained military pressure on the rebels, provided incentives for guerillas to demobilize, and offered large rewards for the death or capture of top leaders.

Alvaro Uribe

This year alone about 1,000 rebels have been killed or captured. One of the top commanders was killed by his own security guard for the $1 million reward on his head. Shortly afterward one of the icons of the FARC, a female leader know as Karina, turned herself in. She had been with the rebels for 24 years, but she said she no longer felt safe among her fellow fighters. For a poor soldier $1 million is a huge temptation. She described a fragmented, disorganized force, as she had been cut off from her unit for months and had had no contact with the top commanders for two years. Other defectors say there is a severe lack of basic necessities in the camps, including food, boots and uniforms. In some cases, those in control of the funds have fled with the money.

Since the beginning of the year, the government reported, over 860 FARC fighters have turned themselves in. Over the last six years about 10,000 have surrendered their weapons. The defectors complained of hunger, fear and a sense of futility. Karina went on national television to urge other fighters to demobilize. "I'm convinced," she said, "that nothing can be gained from fighting any longer."

In a well-publicized publicity campaign, the Colombian government offers former fighters a chance for a better life, financial incentives, job training, health care, and lenient prison sentences. Many youth, disillusioned by the hardships and boredom of life in the bush, have accepted the government offer, and the government seems to be following through on its promises.

The FARC is in many respects a relic of the Cold War. Its founding ambition was to overthrow the Colombian regime and to establish a communist society in the country. It drew its recruits from an impoverished and unemployed peasantry and from Marxist idealists. It has its origins in the 60s, but as recently as 2002 it was still able to mount an attack on the capital during the inauguration of Uribe, firing missiles and mortars into the heart of the city. Over the years it has sustained itself with the lucrative drug trade and kidnappings. An estimated 700 hostages are still being held by various groups.

Now even among the peasants and leftists, the FARC has lost support. Recently hundreds of thousands of Colombians took to the streets to call for an end to the kidnappings that have kept many

See **Colombia** *on page 3*

In Britain, plan for carbon-neutral 'ecotowns' draws rural ire

Mark Rice-Oxley

You're the prime minister of a small, rich nation with a growing population, pressing space constraints, a chronic housing shortage, and a perennial need to be green. What do you do? Gordon Brown thinks he has the answer. In

See **Ecotowns** *on page 2*

Ecotowns *continued*

one of his boldest policies since he assumed power last year, the British premier is planning to build a cluster of completely new ultramodern "ecotowns" on sites dotted around the English countryside.

Windmills and solar power, biomass heating facilities, car-free streets, and subterranean recycling chutes will result in net carbon dioxide emissions of zero or less.

But the innovative plan is pitting urbanites' vision of green utopia against the ire of rural England, whose residents are loath to let their pristine environs be despoiled.

"This is completely the wrong site," says Pete Seaward of Weston, a village in Oxfordshire shortlisted as an ecotown. He holds up a scenic picture of a local lake. "If they're saying that it is 'eco' to build on and fill in a lake like that, they are dreaming."

Ron Field, chairman of the parish council at Ford, another site on the eco-village shortlist, adds that there is huge local concern that this is just another ruse to allow developers to make money.

"We don't want it because it's plunked in the middle of a small hamlet in between two coastal towns which they spent millions and millions of pounds trying to regenerate," he says.

"They're building it on 600 acres of green field land which is used for growing food crops to feed the people that live in our area, and it's all done as far as we can see for money."

Aimed at meeting housing shortage

But such thinking ignores an important motivation for the project – Britain's acute housing shortage – says Kate Henderson of the Town and Country Planning Association think tank in London, which advised the government on the ecotown strategy. In many cases, she points out, the vocal opponents are rural "haves" who do not understand the predicament of the urban "have-nots."

"Those in the countryside who are fortunate enough to have a garden and green space for their children are the voices you hear the most," she says, "whereas the massive majority are not able to get on the housing ladder, are living with their parents, are living in poor rented accommodations and are not able to access the housing market."

Brown's plan is aimed at addressing acute population and housing problems in Europe's most densely populated country. Britain not only has a population that is growing once again; it has more and more single-occupancy households. House prices have soared in the past decade, and though the market is currently falling, prices are still well beyond the affordability of the majority of first-time buyers.

"There is a fundamental mismatch between supply and demand in the housing market and the government is committed to addressing this in the long term by building more homes," said a government spokesman.

May lack social 'glue'

The ecovillages will be the first towns built in Britain in 40 years – part of an overall strategy to build 3 million new homes in Britain by 2020. A final list of up to 10 sites are to be selected by 2009.

At least 30 percent of ecotown housing must be offered at "affordable" prices. Ecotowns must have at least 5,000 homes. Anything less, planners say, and it's hard to sustain schools – the glue of any self-sustaining community.

The lack of such glue, particularly in the initial few years of an ecotown, is a major concern. Members of Parliament (MP) opposed to such developments say they will situate people in remote areas divorced from their place of work, meaning commuter miles will shoot up – hardly very "eco."

They warn that communities will take years to become self-sustaining, as developers build the houses first but take much longer to add the schools, shops, and other infrastructure that binds a town together.

And they warn that legal challenges based on the argument that eco-towns have ridden roughshod over planning law will mount up, slamming the brakes on the schemes.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Conservative MP for a constituency shortlisted for an ecotown, says that the developments should instead be "bolted on to a big city," as in the case of a pioneering German prototype on the outskirts of Freiburg. That way, he argues, you situate people closer to employment, facilities and – crucially – public transport.

"You get all the facilities of a big city – a university, hospital, and, what's more, you get a better community bolted on to a big city because all of their friends and relatives are nearby," he says.

Not everyone is opposed to the idea, however. A recent government survey found people supported ecotowns by a majority of 5 to 1, though that fell to 2 to 1 when people were asked if they'd like one on their own doorstep. Friends of the Earth said eco-towns "could provide an inspiring blueprint for low-carbon living."

High environmental standards

The developments must live up to the highest environmental standards. Housing must be carbon-neutral, with windmills and solar power providing energy.

Most ecotowns say they aspire to be "car-free," settlements in which personal vehicles are parked on the outskirts and regular buses or trams shuttle people in to their homes.

Developments must make use of the latest efficient heating systems such as combined heat and power plants, or biomass.

One shortlisted development, at Whitehill-Bordon in southern England, claims that more than 70 percent of locals support it. But council chief executive Will Godfrey admits this is because the ecotown would be different from other projects as it would regenerate an existing town rather than build afresh on unspoiled countryside.

"You have to have a commitment to develop a town, not just build houses," he says, adding that business must be drawn into the new town to make it self-sustaining. "At the moment, 70 percent of people commute out of the town," he adds. "We want to create a place where people can live, work, and play in the town in which they reside."

Conservative MP Peter Luff thinks that is fanciful. "This is an idea that will bring disaster to the people who live there because they'll be miserably locked in these so-called ecocommunities miles from anything they actually want," he says. "My view is that one or two should be built as pilot projects, and then see what lessons can be learned."

Mark Rice-Oxley is a correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Why cap and trade could backfire

Credits remove stigma – and may increase pollution

Justin Danhof

Washington–Environmentalists claim that capping greenhouse-gas emissions and creating a market for emissions trading – a policy prescription called "cap-and-trade" – would reduce carbon dioxide output and with it the risk of global warming.

But it could achieve the opposite.

Here's how: By turning carbon emissions into commodities that can be bought and sold, cap-and-trade policies could remove the stigma from producing such emissions.

In the late 1990s, Israeli researchers Uri Gneezy and Aldo Rustichini performed an experiment that provides a useful model. They chose six random day-care centers in Haifa at which parents sometimes arrived late to pick up their children. Intending to reduce the frequency of tardiness, the two imposed a fine on late parents. Mr. Gneezy and Mr. Rustichini explain that, typically, "when negative consequences are imposed on a behavior, they will produce a reduction of that particular response." But the experiment did not produce the anticipated results. Instead, the incidence of late arrivals increased.

In fact, the percentage of parents who were late more than doubled.

Behavioral law and economics help explain this counterintuitive result.

Prior to the imposition of the fine, parents – recognizing it is wrong to make a teacher stay past normal hours with their children – experienced feelings of guilt and shame when they were late. In other words, some parents were motivated to arrive on time by the stigma attached to arriving late. Imposing the fine reduced the stigma. The fine created a good, and a market where none previously existed. Parents were no longer "arriving late," but rather, purchasing extra child-care hours.

A similar situation could occur under a cap-and-trade regime. Under cap-and-trade rules, the government places an artificial cap on the amount of carbon each regulated facility may emit. Facilities producing more carbon than they are allowed are required to purchase additional credits to make up the difference. The opportunity to purchase these credits creates a market where none previously existed.

As in the example of the fined parents, the purchase of the right to emit greenhouse gases would likely reduce any stigma associated with doing so. Emission levels, consequently, could rise.

This phenomenon is already seen on an individual level. Al Gore says the risk of catastrophic global warming is so great that Americans should act immediately to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Yet his home uses 20 times more energy than the average American home, according to the Tennessee Center for Policy Research. That's OK, the former vice president assures us, because he purchases offsets to ensure that he lives a carbon-neutral lifestyle.

His message – albeit unintentional – is simple: Produce carbon to your heart's content; just pay a carbon broker to "neutralize" your carbon footprint and your guilt.

If Mr. Gore could not purchase offsets, would he feel more pressure to reduce his energy use? The likely answer is "yes."

Columnist Charles Krauthammer explains in *Time* magazine that "purchasing carbon credits is an incentive to burn even more fossil fuels, since now it is done under the illusion that it's really cost free to the atmosphere."

Perhaps that helps explain why most European nations have increased their carbon emissions since adopting the Kyoto global-warming treaty in 1997. By most accounts, the European Union's cap-and-trade system isn't working. In its first year of operation (2005-06), emissions covered by the trading scheme rose 0.8 percent. During the same time, according to the Energy Information Agency, emissions in the US – which hasn't ratified the Kyoto Protocol or adopted a cap-and-trade system – dropped 1.8 percent.

Samuel Bowles, a professor at the Santa Fe Institute, has noted that "[p]olicies designed to harness self-regarding preferences to public ends may be counterproductive. These failures occur when conventional self-interest-based policies compromise the beneficial effects of intrinsic motivation and ... a desire to uphold social norms."

The social stigma of carbon emissions grows stronger each day. As this stigma grows, companies are increasing their investments into research and technologies to reduce and store carbon. If Congress removes the stigma associated with these emissions by assigning a price to them, it may not like the results.

• Justin Danhof is a research associate with The National Center for Public Policy Research, a nonpartisan, nonprofit educational foundation based in Washington.

Colombia *cont. from page 1*

living in fear. They also urged the rebels to release their hostages and enter into peace talks. FARC leaders, however, quickly rejected the appeal and declared that they were committed to the violent overthrow of the government.

Even Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, once a supporter of the FARC, changed his mind recently and urged the guerillas to disarm and release their hostages. "The guerilla war is history," he said. "At this moment in Latin America an armed guerilla movement is out of place."

The victories over the FARC and the reduction in violence have inspired some to speak of "Colombia's transformation" and even of a "miraculous turnaround" (*World Politics Review*, July). That may be overly optimistic, but it reflects the hope that Colombians are investing in the Uribe government. After the rescue of the hostages, Uribe's approval rating, already at a high of 73 percent, soared to 85 percent. This is Uribe's second and final term in office, as no one can serve more than two terms, but many are already talking about a constitutional amendment that would allow him to run for a third term.

As security returns, so does greater prosperity, for investors are beginning to return to a country that looked very shaky only a few years ago.

Cesar Restrepo, an analyst with the think tank Security and Democracy, warned that the FARC will never be completely eliminated. There is simply too much money to be made from drugs. Although the rebel force may no longer be a unified force, and although it may have been driven from areas it once controlled, it still has a strong foothold in the southwestern jungles where most of the cocoa is grown.

Over the years the FARC hasn't been the only source of violence and murder, of course. Right-wing death squads with deep tentacles into the government also terrorized the populace. Here, too, drug money played a huge role in spreading corruption among politicians and judges. Under Uribe's government, the death squads have been disbanded and investigators are tracing their ties into almost every party. About 20 percent of Colombia's Congress has already been implicated, many are on trial and some are already behind bars.

The paramilitaries even used the threat of violence and murder to influence elections, and they were responsible for the assassination of many union leaders.

The Berlin Wall may have fallen in 1989, but many countries, especially in Latin America and Africa have continued to suffer the ill effects of the protracted showdown of the Cold War. In the effort to quash revolutionary movements, the US and the West often ignored how that force was exercised. There was little or no legitimacy on either side.

The prominent historian Niall Ferguson argues that Cold war is a misnomer for the post-WWII years, for in many smaller countries it was a decidedly hot war that tore them asunder for decades.

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE NEXT TIME THE MARKETS CORRECT?

How will your portfolio stand up in the next bear market?

Are you looking for a reasonable rate of return without sticking your neck out?

Do you have/want **PEACE OF MIND** over your finances?

For a no obligation, free assessment of your portfolio,

Call me now,
24 hours at 1-800-541-0977 local 209
(downtown office)

CLARENCE WEIMA CFP
Executive Financial Consultant

1-800-488-9817 (home)
clarence.weima@investorsgroup.com

The Plan by Investors Group™

Investors Group Financial Services Inc.

™Trademarks owned by IGM Financial Inc. and licensed to its subsidiary corporations.

TORONTO 2008 AMSTERDAM

Via Martinair

The 2008 Martinair charter flights are now available.
Prices are fantastically low.

Book Now and Save!

VERSTRAETE TRAVEL & CRUISES

2 office locations to serve you:

36 Secord Drive
St.Catharines ON
Tel 905-934-4414
or 1-800-405-6088

14845 Yonge St.
Aurora ON
Tel 416-969-8100
or: 1-800-565-9267

visit us at: www.verstraetetravel.com

Guest editorial

The dancing Calvinist

Peter Schuringa

American satirist H. L. Mencken once wrote: "Puritanism – the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." The Puritans – like other Calvinists – are perceived as a rather austere, doctrinally persnickety, and generally morose bunch of Christians. On a similar note Max Weber said that an exaggerated work ethic evolved from Calvinism because of the psychological need for Calvinists to prove their divine election through earthly success (as is often seen in the Old Testament.) Work hard, theologize hard, and "get it right."

Some Calvinian traditions still fit this characterization pretty closely. I won't name them here, but they are usually the type of people who have left the CRC over any one of several controversial issues that have shaken the church over the last few decades or more.

What may be more surprising to you is that those often associated with the Kuyperian stream of neo-Calvinism can also easily fall into a toilsome religious ethic. The language of "engaging," "transforming" and "redeeming" culture is precious and unquestionable, but on its own it can become not only triumphalistic, but human-centred and burdensome. Transformationalists are called to "build the kingdom" and to be actively working for an alternative culture. Linked to this, as in Richard H. Niebuhr's book *Christ and Culture*, is a focus mainly on the second person of the Trinity.

Thankfully, there are some ways to ameliorate this drive to action and construction.

Contemporary Testimony revised

What is interesting is that the CRCNA Synod adopted a revision of its 1986 *Contemporary Testimony* this past June (available on the web) that shows some awareness of this tendency. Sure, there were adjustments with regard to new issues like global warming, the Internet, and embryonic research. The study committee itself explained to Synod that much of its revisions were stylistic. But there is one alteration I want to highlight that few have noticed. This includes a more celebratory tone and more attention on God the Spirit.

Let me begin by saying I have always appreciated the *Contemporary Testimony* as poetic, up-to-date introduction to the question: "So, what's your church all about, anyway?" I've used it with students on campus and with new members in church. I wish we used it more often, especially now with the new version.

My focus here, however, begins with a personal e-mail quote from the study committee's reporter, Clayton Libolt:

The first time we read through the 1986 Testimony in committee, we were struck by the sense of duty it conveyed. It seemed all duty and little celebration of God and God's world. The one who pointed this up for us first, and who provided some of the best language in correcting it, was the late George Vandervelde. George was a member of the original committee, so his own spiritual journey paralleled that of the Testimony, old and new.

These changes are subtle, but they can off-set the tone of the document. Paragraph #9 changes "worship and service" to "worship and wonder." Paragraph #10 added the word "enjoy." Paragraph #28 replaced the word "pouring" with the more flamboyant "drenching" of the Spirit at Pentecost. The previous document's mention of "the Spirit's gifts… in rich variety" is put more colourfully: "God the Spirit lavishes gifts… in astonishing variety." Finally, rest and leisure are given their own paragraph rather than being tucked in the paragraph on work.

Libolt explained the change in detail more fully with a helpful analogy:

The point is that Christians learn not only to seek transformation but to celebrate what already exists. Here the image of the gardener from Genesis 2 is apropos and strong. Gardeners (my wife is one) do seek transformation, but they also celebrate new life. After a run, Adria always walks around the gardens, noting each plant, which of them need water, transplanting, or something else, and which of them are blooming. It's the latter that is often missing in Reformed descriptions of the Christian life.

If we truly seek to mitigate our tendency to over-serious Protestant workaholism, this transition in language is a helpful pointer. Church tradition has always described the Christian life as both *active* and *contemplative*, and if we are always describing our faith in terms of an engaging, transforming, and redeeming of culture we will lose sight of the fact that it is God that ultimately finishes that project. That point is crystal clear in the testimony: "The future is secure, for our world belongs to God…. Come, Lord Jesus."

Reformed Pentecostal?

There is more. Nietzsche once criticized the Christians of his time, saying: "They would have to sing better songs to me that I might believe in their Redeemer: his disciples would have to look more redeemed!"

I'm delighted that for a church tradition known for its gravity, the word "play" appears twice in both versions of the document and "laugh" comes once. There is an energy and enthusiasm in the document that is neither defensive nor manipulative. Calvin Seerveld said already long ago in his *Rainbows for a Fallen World:* "we Christ-followers need an understanding of playfulness if we are going to take sanctification by the Holy Spirit seriously. We need to curb and re-form our Darwinian work ethic, and thoroughly reject the righteousness of phylacteries…." For Seerveld, playfulness is a large part of obedient aesthetic life – modeled for us by God's protégé Wisdom (Prov. 8:30-31).

I suspect some of the widespread influence of the Pentecostal movement is rubbing off on our church. A previous Synodical study committee on "Third-Wave Pentecostalism" prescribed an "open but cautious" attitude towards this spiritual explosion, a wildfire that is best described as a spirituality of celebration. Says Harvey Cox, a Harvard religion professor who recently wrote a book on the Pentecostal movement: "part of what made my work so easy and enjoyable is that Pentecostals tend to be very happy about their faith and they want you to share that happiness."

I recognize that if this comes with an inability to lament it can be equally restrictive and destructive. But we have as much to learn as to critique. Reformed/Pentecostal Calvin College philosophy professor Jamie Smith had an article in *Christianity Today* this past May entitled "Teaching a Calvinist to Dance." Smith is wary of Reformed worship sliding into a treatment of "human beings as if we're brains-on-a-stick." He claims that "being charismatic actually makes me a better Calvinist; my being Pentecostal is actually a way for me to be more Reformed." Classic Reformed themes like the goodness of creation and the sovereignty of God invite us, he says, to be open to the joyful surprise of the Spirit and a full-bodied hand-raising, body-swaying, high-touch worship. If God is truly God, says Smith, he is God of bodies, surprises, and play. He is the God of Pentecostal celebration, too, a tradition rooted in the church's very DNA.

In effect, if the Reformed tradition has three strands –the Pietist, the Doctrinalist, and the Transformationalist – the Pietistic strand, which gladly links arms with the Pentecostal movement, and the Doctrinalist's emphasis on sovereignty and the goodness of creation, may have some resources that the Transformationalist cannot live without. Or at least cannot live cheerfully without. Long-term cultural engagement requires a bed-rock of glad, disciplined spirituality. In fact, one Reformed catechism says it is the *chief end of all humanity* to glorify and enjoy God forever (Westminster Confession Q. and A. #1).

Play, laughter, dance, and joy. They do not sound of work and duty, but they ought to have equal status in our testimony. Perhaps it is our duty to make it so. Then our work may become more like play and our play a little less like work.

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to: report on significant events in the Christian community and the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and rooted in a Reformed perspective; provide contact for the Christian community.

EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF

Editor: Harry der Nederlanden editor@christiancourier.ca

Circulation: Rose der Nederlanden rose@christiancourier.ca

Accounts/Advertising Manager: Ineke Medcalf-Strayer ads@christiancourier.ca

The publication of comments, opinions or advertising does not imply agreement or endorsement by *Christian Courier* or the publisher. Please contact circulation if you cannot afford the subscription price but want to receive *Christian Courier.*

Christian Courier

5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1

Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838

Web site: www.christiancourier.ca

Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs. Canada

Letters/News

These brothers (and sisters) of mine

A *Newsweek* article on Barak Obama's faith refers to the importance of Matthew 25 for Christian social action. This is also a favorite text for biblically based relief agencies, such as the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and others. The last judgment, as described in the parable of the sheep and goats told there, seems to be based on whether or not we feed, clothe and visit Christ in prison as he appears to us in the form of the world's poor. They are "the least of these brothers of mine" (25:40). But is that what Jesus intended?

I don't think so and I was glad to come across confirmation of this in an article in the November 14, 1983 *Banner* (denominational magazine of the Christian Reformed Church) by Dr. Andrew Bandstra, then professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary. There is also a supportive editorial by Andrew Kuyvenhoven. Neither wants to undermine the importance of ministry to the poor in general; it's just that this text is not the place to find biblical support for that.

Bandstra makes the point that nowhere else does Jesus refer to the poor and needy in general as his brothers, but twice in Matthew's Gospel, he refers to his disciples as "my brothers" (12:48-49; 28:10). He also tells his disciples in Matthew 23:8 that they are "all brothers."

Notice also that in chapter 25:32, "all the nations" are gathered before Jesus. Bandstra says, "This phrase suggests that the real point of the parable is about how the Gentile nations receive the disciples of Jesus as they go out into the world preaching the good news about the kingdom of God" (24:14). The good deeds for which they are or are not commended "are not general works of morality and care, but deeds of kindness shown to Jesus' disciples when they would arrive in town preaching the gospel. Sometimes hungry or thirsty, sometimes sick, alone, and unclothed, sometimes imprisoned for the sake of the gospel."

The article then shows how this ties in with Matthew 10:42 about giving a cup of cold water to one of Jesus' disciples as well as with the Apostle Paul's later experiences in bringing the gospel to the nations (I Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:23-29; cf. also 3 John 5).

Bandstra concludes by suggesting that the message of Matthew 25 might be more appropriate for Mission Emphasis Week than for World Hunger Sunday, because its message is more about how we receive Christ and his gospel through his messengers than about helping the poor in general.

I'd like to take this a step further and say I believe it is most appropriate for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, celebrated every November by churches around the world. If we are to be judged by how we receive Christ's suffering servants, we may not have as much opportunity to do the kind of things Jesus talks about as people did in the early church and still do in countries where the church is actively persecuted, but the least we can do is pray for them.

J. Cameron Fraser is pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Lethbridge, Alberta.

CRC's Faith Alive produces 'New Testament hymnal'

Marian Van Til

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Faith Alive and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship have jointly released a hymnal that "encourages congregations to dwell with Scripture in song by working its way canonically from Matthew through Revelation with songs from a variety of genres." Faith Alive is the Christian Reformed Church's publishing ministry, formerly called CRC Publications. The Calvin Institute, located on the campus of Calvin College, was founded in 1997 to "promote the scholarly study of the theology, history, and practice of Christian worship and the renewal of worship."

The new hymnal is called *Singing the New Testament*. Since the Bible is the foundation of our faith – "all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17) – it is important that Scripture be at the heart of our sung worship and theology, say the hymnals producers.

The hymns either quote or paraphrase texts of the New Testament. They are arranged according to their biblical content, following the order of the books of the New Testament. Only 2nd Thessalonians, Philemon and 2nd and 3rd John have no hymns based on their content. The gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John – follow Jesus's ministry, as those books do, but the hymns based on them are listed by theme rather than the individual Bible books: Advent/John the Baptist; Christmas/Birth of Christ; Baptism and Beginning of Ministry; Christ's Teaching; Christ's Miracles; Transfiguration; Passion/Palm Sunday; Maundy Thursday; Good Friday; Easter; Post-Resurrection.

The hymnal's producers say this hymn collection is "a resource for those who desire to put Scripture in the mouths, minds and hearts of God's people, whether those people gather in small groups, in choirs, or as a congregation. Just as various Scripture passages can be used as prayer, praise, lament, or teaching, so can these songs." They add a suggestion for their use: "You may choose to use them in various parts of the worship service, making the connection between Scripture, preaching and song, thus enabling your congregants to dwell more fully with Scripture itself." Notes on each song are included in the back of the book. There are also usage and musical suggestions.

Faith Alive and the Calvin Institute of Worship also point out that this hymnal includes music from "a wide range of styles and time periods, with many of the texts and tunes in public domain, and others covered by basic copyright licenses that churches can purchase." Many of the tunes will be familiar to churchgoers, or "very accessible."

Singing the New Testament is available for $19.95 US from Faith Alive Christian Resources (<www.FaithAliveResources.org> or 1-800-333-8300). For 30 or more copies the price drops to $12.95 each.

Knight appointed editor of Anglican Journal

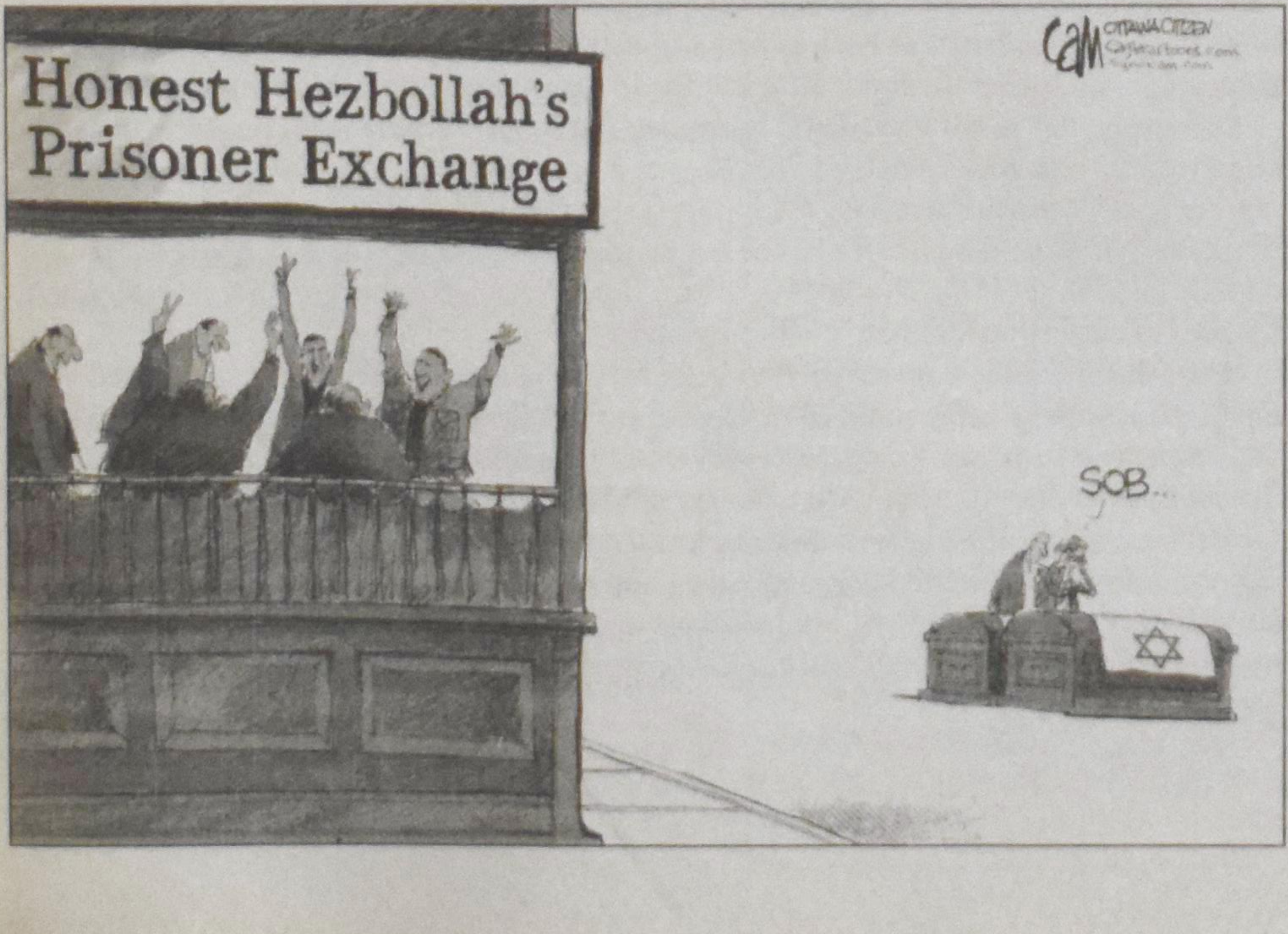
Keith Knight, a former editor of *Christian Courier* (when it was still called *Calvinist Contact*) has been appointed editor of *The Anglican Journal*, the monthly editorially-independent publication of The Anglican Church of Canada.

Knight has made the rounds ecumenically. He served as communications director of the Christian Reformed Church, then became communications director of The Presbyterian Church in Canada where he served for nine years.

He served as editor of *Calvinist Contact* from 1976 until 1981, taking over when the former editor Dick Farenhorst was suffering from terminal cancer. Knight moved the publication from Hamilton to St. Catharines and formed Knight Publishing Company.

He serves on the global board of the World Association for Christian Communication and is president of the North America region's executive committee. Despite being ecumenically involved, he has remained rooted in the Christian Reformed Church. He serves on council at First Christian Reformed Church in Guelph and is the stated clerk of Classis Huron.

He says he is looking forward to the challenge of serving as editor of the Anglican Journal, Canada's largest denominational publication, reaching 500,000 Anglicans monthly. "The Journal is editorially independent and has a long history of challenging the church's leadership and its decisions. I inherited an award-winning editorial staff and I look forward to writing editorials and being engaged with the broader church," Knight said.



Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association

Canada Mail:
PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40009999
REGISTRATION NO. 9375
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO
CHRISTIAN COURIER
5 JOANNA DR
ST. CATHARINES ON L2N 1V1
email: **subscriptions@christiancourier.ca**

U.S. Mail:
Christian Courier
(USPS 518-090)
Second-class postage paid at
Lewiston NY
Postmaster: send address changes
to: Christian Courier, Box 110
Lewiston NY 14092

Subscriptions:	**Canada (G.S.T. incl.)**	**USA**	**Overseas**
one yr. (24 issues)	$44.00	$44.00 US	$85.00
two yrs. (48 issues)	$85.00	$85.00 US	

Advertising deadlines: display and classified advertising: Tuesday, 9 a.m. (13 days before publication date) See classified pages or web site **www.christiancourier** for more details. (ISSN 1192-3415) Published second and fourth Monday of each month.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838
e-mail: Advertising: ads@christiancourier.ca
Subscriptions: subscriptions@christiancourier.ca

PRINTED IN CANADA

Perspective

"Adultolescence": Wings without roots

Eternal Student
Peter Schuurman

Peter Schuurman

The August 2007 issue of *The Banner* contained a feature article that asks: "Where Did Our Young Adults Go?" In it Gayla Postma cites a study showing how 40 per cent of CRC kids do not make profession of faith, which is corroborated by a wider Barna Group survey that shows 58 per cent of church kids stop attending church weekly by age 29.

These statistics are followed up by anecdotal notes from students who have left the ranks of the CRC. Some say the CRC isn't practical enough or isn't passionate enough to attract them and their friends. Apparently the CRC is too "safe"; yet, it is also too critical and divisive. Others say the church lacks the "critical mass" of youth – the peers they want to hang out with – because it typically puts its best efforts into ministries other than young adults.

The article contends that students have always left the church for a time after they leave home. In the past they have normally come back after a short hiatus. However, these "limbo" years are being extended longer and longer, and people are getting married later and later, and many never boomerang back with toddlers anymore. This is an interesting trend that deserves deeper analysis, not least of all because it mirrors the story of my wife and me.

Emerging adulthood

My wife and I spent our twenties learning and exploring – in terms of our vocation, faith, and dating life. Looking back, we would have preferred marriage before age 30 and spent less time and energy roaming and searching. We were following our best lights, or so we thought. But this is not just our own story.

Life used to come in three clear stages: childhood, adulthood, old age. Now we have six: childhood, adolescence, odyssey, adulthood, active retirement and old age.

Christian Smith in a Nov/Dec 2007 *Books and Culture* article entitled "Getting a Life" surveys the research to make the case for a "new life stage": emerging adulthood, "adultolescence" or as others have called it "the odyssey years." This delay of adulthood – or prolonging of adolescence – stretches from age 18 to 30. Just as "teenager" was a culturally conditioned stage of life that was formed by changes in labor laws and mass education in the earlier 20th century, so is emerging adulthood a cultural construction of our time.

If we define adulthood by certain rites of passage like moving away from home, becoming financially independent, and getting married and starting a family, in 1960, roughly 70 percent of 30-year-olds had achieved these things. By 2000, fewer than 40 percent of 30-year-olds had done the same. Smith suggests that the growth of higher education, the delay of marriage, the increasing flux of the job market, and the willingness of parents to financially support their older children are all broader social forces that have helped create this new phenomenon. Our age is characterized by fluidity, and our youth mirror it.

Life used to come in three clear stages: childhood, adulthood, old age. Now we have six: childhood, adolescence, odyssey, adulthood, active retirement and old age.

Odyssey comes with a dark side. The transition to adulthood today, says Smith, "is more complex, disjointed, and confusing than it was in past decades." The "steps" through schooling to a job are less well organized and less coherent than before, and this awkward journey usually coincides with disengagement from church. The exit from church, in effect, is less about "secular influences" like the university, TV, and Internet per se, and more about the length of time young adults are detached from the influence of the church's minority culture.

My wife and I "came back" to our inherited Christian community, but such is far from the rule. Emerging adults, through a decade or even two of drifting, are shaped by mass culture more than anything. This generally means absorbing consumer-oriented values and learning promiscuous sexual activity as the norm. Some wandering in the odyssey years can be genuine learning and improvising, but Smith maintains it's not entirely clear how much "is mere rationalization for self-indulgence and, at its worst, sheer narcissism."

Church as minority culture

We ought not to blame covenant children for selfishly putting off commitment to marriage, church, work and family. As mentioned, there are many social forces that encourage this "postponed life." Still, there are a few things that can be done to ameliorate what Smith calls a "black hole in the life of the church."

Smith makes a fairly radical suggestion: he says we might begin by re-thinking the traditional view that education and financial independence must precede marriage. In fact, he goes so far as to say that parents ought to consider financially supporting their children well into marriage so that matrimony and family bare less of the stigma of a financial liability.

We know marriage and family are not the pinnacle of Christ-like imitation. Jesus was single and Paul recommended it for the sake of God's mission. Yet – like little else – marriage and family require a daily practice of self-giving that goes against the grain of our culture. In fact, they are a large part of our creaturely life. They also happen to have a stronger effect on church attendance than anything else.

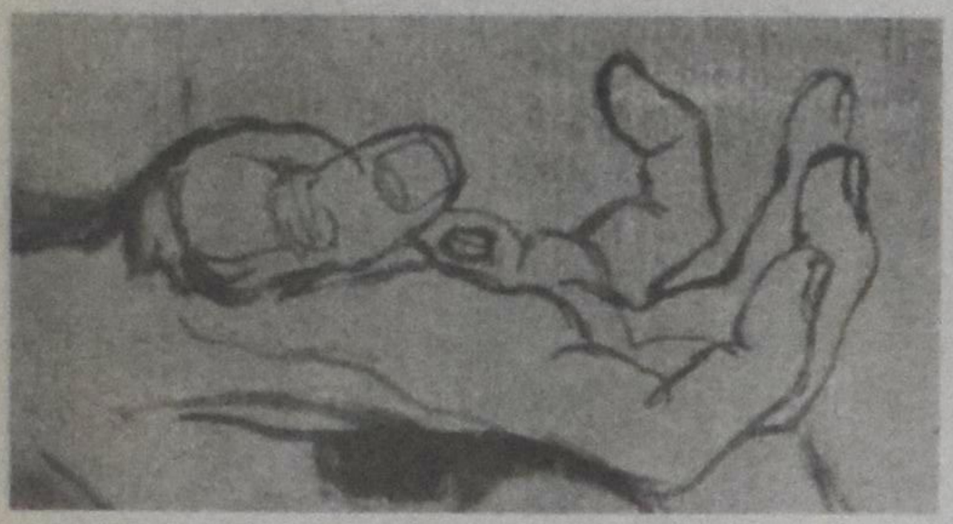
Smith explains this in more detail, including some deeper philosophical convictions about "getting a life." He insists that "true, authentic selves are made more than found. It is arguably as much or more by making and keeping promises than by dabbling and deferring that we come to know who we as persons really are and are called to become." Our culture is saturated with a call to freedom (understood as a freedom from rather than a freedom to) and a nauseating focus on the idol of self. This is not what we were created to cultivate.

Looking back, when I felt pressure to marry within my church and family I resented it. I assumed all the nudges and hints came from an idolatry of family and a lack of understanding for my "unique" situation. Now I wonder how much the recommendations came from a genuine call to obedient creaturely life in the midst of a liquid culture, and how much my reaction was born in a mix of presumed autonomy and a very real, deep pain. Roaming to and fro about the earth for 15 years can be hellishly lonely.

Obviously, this is not just a CRC issue; yet *The Banner* article that I began with ends with a call to repentance for the CRC. We need to re-examine ourselves and re-distribute our energies. What is interesting about this research is that it shows most emerging adults in the church share the same values of autonomy, money, career, and marriage as those outside the church. If the church is to offer a healing balm for this growing demographic, it needs to nurture an alternative minority culture.

What that means is this: we need to learn how to launch our emerging adults well and equip them with an acute sense of cultural discernment. Higher education, money, dating and career can be issues we discuss together as a community. We need to keep asking the question, what does it mean to be a mature Christian in this age? What does it mean to have a clear sense of identity and mission in a culture of growing adultolescence? How can we minister to this vital demographic – and how can they be better recruited for service in God's new world of righteousness and justice? Ultimately, to neglect this issue is to agree to melt, like the mainlines, into a bubbling liquid culture.

The picture above shows Peter Schuurman lying on some rocks while hiking his odyssey years away in B.C. Peter is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



In God's hand

Surrounded by your love and care
Safe as a priceless treasure
My fragile being lies enclosed
In safety beyond measure

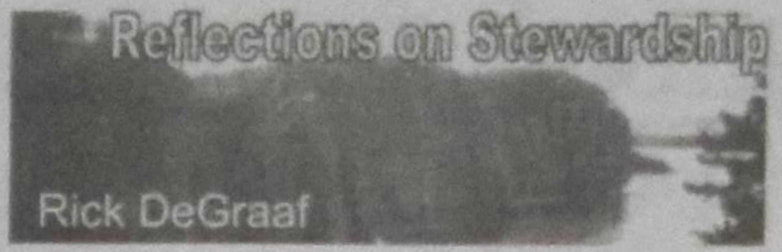
God you were there when I began
My sojourn on this earth
Your love gives value to my life
Far more than human worth

For in and of myself, I know
I am but frail and small
And in, and of myself, I am
Not worth a lot at all

But I am yours; you hold me fast
In love's bond none can sever
and in your hand, in my safe place
I rest secure, forever.

, Coby Veenstra

See! I will not forget you.
I have carved you on the palm of my hand.
Isaiah 40:15,16



Tithing & generous giving

Do you tithe? Not all Christians do. For some tithing is a part of discipleship that brings joy to the giver, but for others it may feel more like paying another bill. I hope the latter is not the case for you!

When it comes to tithing, Jesus did not talk much about it and when he did specifically comment on tithing it was connected to a warning about the hypocrisy that he saw associated with it (Matt. 23:23). Jesus was critical of the very visible and pious acts of the teachers of the law (scribes and members of the priestly order) who tithed everything but ignored the needs of widows and orphans. Jesus' criticism stung them and instilled in them a desire to get rid of this Jesus. Although the various grouping of the teachers of the law were not known to work together, they came together to collaborate on how to deal with Jesus and get him out of their way. Yet they knew they had to be careful because Jesus was popular and many considered him to be a prophet!

On one occasion they were confident that they had come up with the ideal trap: you can read the story in Luke 20:20-26. They began by flattering Jesus and complimenting him on his forthrightness, hoping that would set the trap for what they were going to ask. After which, they popped this question: "Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Specifically, they were referring to the notorious head tax which required was by all who were subject to Caesar. It was positioned as a tribute to Caesar and it required the giving of a specific coin for that purpose – a denarius. Each of Caesar's subjects was required to pay a denarius, which represented one full day of labour. On one side of the denarius coin was inscribed the image of Caesar and the reverse bore an inscription that basically honoured him as a god!

Now the scribes figured if Jesus said 'no' to their question, then they would report him to the Roman Governor and have him arrested as a subversive. But if Jesus answered "yes" to their question, then they would trap him with the basic commandment that said one must worship God alone and no other! Either way, they figured they had Jesus trapped!

Now, what did Jesus do? He began by asking them to show him the coin used for the head tax. He then asked them whose image and inscription was on the coin. When they answered that it was Caesar's, then Jesus gave this answer: "Pay to Caesar what is Caesar's but give to God what is God's." Maybe your translation of the Bible doesn't use exactly those words; however, I understand that in the original language Jesus specifically uses two different words to distinguish the giving to Caesar from the giving to God. The first word has a sense of giving a tribute or paying a tax while the latter word is one of giving obedience or all of oneself, in the sense of a 'life-offering' to God. Jesus basically says, meet the obligation to Caesar but don't give him your heart and soul, rather, give that to God.

Now, what does this have to do with tithing? Well I think for some tithing is 'taxing'. I'm sure that for many it feels like a duty or an act of obedience, "I have to do this because it is expected of me". With that kind of attitude it would feel like a tax and not a cheerful offering. For the Israelites in Old Testament times, many might have thought of the tithe as an obligation or payment and even as a way to ensure a blessing from Yahweh – like in 'having a margin on God!' A tithe of the harvest (a tenth) simply was expected. It may have been routine or even legalistic for many Jews.

So what about us today? Has writing out the cheque for the church and stuffing it in an envelope become an obligation that you routinely fulfill? Does it feel like paying a tax? You probably don't have the same feeling when it comes to a freewill generous gift in response to an urgent need, or an appeal for help for a Christian ministry that tugs at your heart. Generous giving is not just "paying", unless, you do so more out of a sense of guilt or for other motives such as good public relations. In that case it may feel like "paying" as it becomes a way to appease your conscience or to establish a good image.

In the Bible, the people of Israel were expected to tithe (which literally meant 10 per cent) to provide for the Levite's ministry in the temple, for the temple upkeep and running costs, and for benevolent responses to needs in the community (including providing for strangers). In Jesus time the teachers of the law had made it a public ritual to display their self-righteous, pious religiosity. They taught that the tithe was an obligation that obedient Jews must follow – by commandment. Yet, Jesus observed that their tithing was heartless because they left widows and orphans neglected (Matt. 23:23). So though their practice might be commendable (if not overdone) their intent had missed the mark of gratitude and compassion that God had put in place when he first instructed Moses to set aside the Levites and practice tithing. Jesus affirmed that tithing was good, but not if it had the wrong motives and not at the cost of compassion and generousity to the needs very evident around them. For the scribes, tithing seemed to be part of works righteousness that would assure them of a good standing with God. Their tithing had a selfish intent and had less to do with having a heartfelt gratitude to God – a gratitude that expressed in love for God and love for fellow mankind!

It is my belief that tithing is a practice that is very healthy for a Christian – if done for the right reasons. It is part of our spiritual disciplines and it must be seen as giving and not paying. It has to have an intention of giving thanks to God. Our gratitude acknowledges that it is God who enables the giving in the first place.

So do tithe but let us not be legalistic about it. If you are now not tithing, make it a goal to get to that level of giving over time – so that you will be tithing or going beyond it. With a heart of gratitude, God is able to bless you and enable you to give a tithe of all you earn and beyond. Make it your personal goal and lay your plan before the Lord – even if the steps you take today are small – just be honest with the Lord and work your plan. When you stretch yourself beyond the planned gift (the tithe) it becomes generous giving. Tithing and giving is best done as the first thing whenever you get paid. Make a decision to then live on the leftovers, instead of ending up giving to God from the leftovers!

Stewardly tip: Plan to tithe. To start, ***Review*** what you've done in the past year; ***Reflect*** on God's grace to you – after all it is he who enables you; and then ***Re-commit*** to give a tithe or beyond. Do one more thing for your own accountability: ***Record** it.*

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Impact investments

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca

Planning a Gift to Charity?

Call CSS for impartial, confidential, and **free** professional advice *across Canada.*

Connecting Donors, Charities & Ministries

Christian Stewardship Services

1-800-267-8890 | admin@csservices.ca
www.csservices.ca

Church

Survey finds unchurched prefer cathedrals to modern, multipurpose church designs

Tobin Perry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – People who don't go to church may be turned off by the the utilitarian church building trend. By a nearly 2-to-1 ratio over any other option, unchurched Americans prefer churches that look more like a medieval cathedral than what most think of as a contemporary church building.

The findings come from a recent survey conducted by LifeWay Research for the Cornerstone Knowledge Network (CKN), a group of church-focused facilities development firms. The online survey included 1,684 unchurched adults – defined as those who had not attended a church, mosque or synagogue in the past six months except for religious holidays or special events. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that sampling error does not exceed 2.4 percent for the total sample.

"Despite billions being spent on church buildings, there was an overall decline in church attendance in the 1990s," says Jim Couchenour, director of marketing and ministry services for Cogun, Inc., a founding member of CKN. "This led CKN to ask, 'As church builders what can we do to help church leaders be more intentional about reaching people who don't go to church?'"

The more church design mattered to unchurched respondents, the more likely they were to prefer the more traditional and ornate worship setting.

'Dressing up' that rectangular box

When given an assortment of four photos of church exteriors and given 100 "preference points" to allocate between them, the unchurched used an average of 47.7 points on the most traditional and Gothic options. The three other options ranged from an average of 18.5 points to 15.9 points.

"We may have been designing buildings based on what we think the unchurched would prefer," Couchenour concluded. "While multi-use space is the most efficient, we need to ask, 'Are there ways to dress up that big rectangular box in ways that would be more appealing to the unchurched?'"

"Quite honestly, this research surprised us," said Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research and LifeWay Christian Resource's missiologist in residence. "We expected they'd choose the more contemporary options, but they were clearly more drawn to the aesthetics of the Gothic building than the run-of-the-mill, modern church building."

Stetzer suggested that the unchurched may prefer the more aesthetically pleasing look of the Gothic cathedral because it speaks to a connectedness to the past, and they elicit a sense of mystery. Young unchurched people were particularly drawn to the Gothic look.

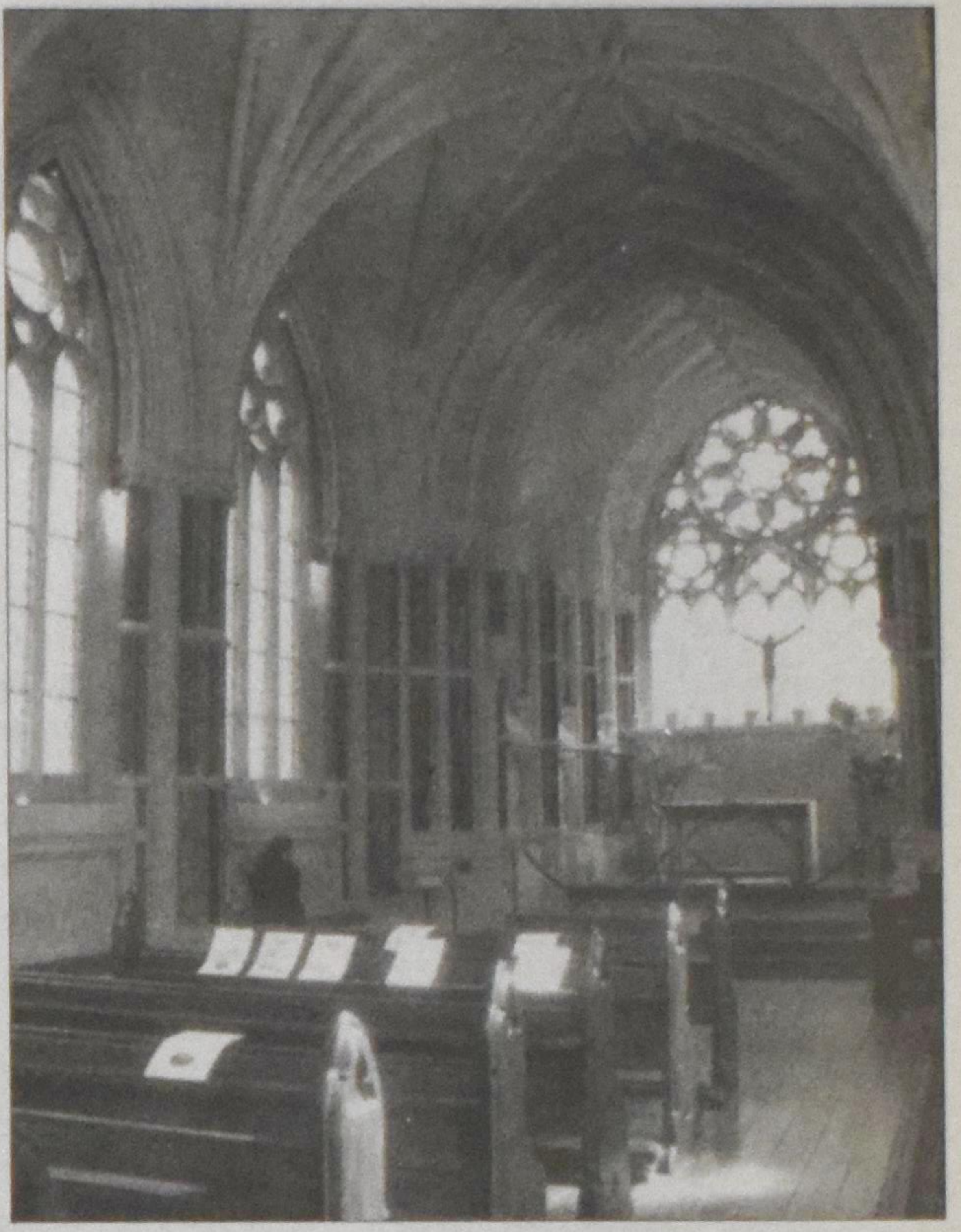
Older folks not drawn to traditional exterior

Survey-takers between the ages of 25 to 34 used an average of 58.9 of their preference points on the more ornate church exterior. Those over the age of 70 only used an average of 32.9 of their 100 preference points on that particular church exterior. While older unchurched people (70 years old and older) were the least likely to prefer the more traditional exterior, they were more likely to prefer the traditional foyer than the youngest segment surveyed. The unchurched also preferred the traditional-looking church foyer, although the preference allocations were more even for this question. All of the foyers received an average of at least 20 preference points.

The Gothic style was preferred by both unchurched Roman Catholics and unchurched Protestants, according to the survey. The average unchurched Roman Catholics gave the design more than 56 of their preference points.

Right: A new take on the Gothic church interior: a modern building that incorporates all the traditional elements that young survey takers say they appreciate in church buildings.

Modern church building below



"I don't like modern churches, they seem cold," said one survey respondent who chose the Gothic design. "I like the smell of candles burning, stained-glass windows, [and] an intimacy that's transcendent."

Church design impacts enjoyment of worship

More than half of the unchurched indicated the design of a church building would impact their enjoyment of a visit to church. Twenty-two percent said the design of the church would strongly impact their enjoyment of the visit and 32 percent indicated it would have some impact. More than a third said it would have no impact whatsoever on their visit.

Stetzer noted that despite these survey results, most of the churches that look like a cathedral are in decline. Just because someone has a preference for the aesthetically pleasing, Gothic churches doesn't mean they'll visit the church if that's the only connection point they have to the congregation, he said.

"Buildings don't reach people, people do," Stetzer said. "But if churches are looking to build and are trying to reach the unchurched, they should take into consideration the kind of building. Costs and other considerations will play into the decision, but the preferences of the unchurched should be considered as well."

The survey also looked at what the unchurched thought about other elements of church design. While still favoring a more traditional look, the preferences of the unchurched were less pronounced on internal elements of church design. Respondents allocated more than a third of their preference points to the most traditional worship space option they were given – which received more than twice as many preference points as the most contemporary choice.

The more church design mattered to unchurched respondents, the more likely they were to prefer the more traditional and ornate worship setting. Those who said church design would affect their worship experience allocated an average of almost half (47 points) of their preference points for the most traditional worship space.

Places for unchurched to connect

Finally, the survey looked into what sociologists call "third place" gathering spots. First place gatherings are where a person lives. Second place gatherings are where a person works. Third place gatherings are where a person comes "to hang out," according to Stetzer.

"In the last few years churches have begun creating third place environments where the lost can come and just hang out," Stetzer said. "This study asked the question, what kind of places do the unchurched like to come to do this?"

More than three times as many people chose a sit-down restaurant (47 percent) rather than any other single response. Other locations that topped the list include: a bar or nightclub (15 percent), a local coffee shop (13 percent), and a sporting event or recreational activity (5 percent).

According to the survey, the reasons they meet with friends where they do is because these places are relaxing (62 percent), casual (55 percent), and fun (29 percent). When asked to describe in their own words design features of the kind of place they'd like to meet a friend, 16 percent of respondents referred to a quiet environment. Another 14 percent mentioned comfortable seating as a factor, and 12 percent said that the spaciousness and openness of the setting was important.

"CKN wanted to give churches another tool for churched and unchurched people to connect well to each other," Stetzer concluded. "One of the things this study revealed is the importance of space in relationships. Insights into these preferences enable churches to include space in which community can be built."

The online survey was conducted earlier this year. The representative, national sample was controlled for a variety of factors including age, race, gender and region of the United States.

UK's United Reformed Church called on to save British farmers

EDINBURGH, Scotland (Christian Today) – Members of the United Reformed Church have been asked to look more carefully at what they eat so that they can help save British farms and farmers. Farmers and growers are "often treated unfairly" by supermarkets, delegates were told. A move to reduce unfairness and injustice by using goods that are fairly traded and locally produced as much as possible received whole-hearted backing from more than 400 delegates to the church's General Assembly in Edinburgh recently.

The Assembly, which brings together church members from across England, Scotland and Wales, was told that farmers were going out of business at an alarming rate. Rev. Janet Flawn from Northumberland, who is also rural consultant to the church's Northern Synod, said, "We need to be fair to farmers in our own country, as well as those in other countries."

Together with other churches, the United Reformed Church will explore how supermarket policies can be influenced, to reduce "abuse of their powers" in determining prices.

Rev. Graham Jones, national rural officer for the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church, was among those at the assembly. Afterwards he said, "I am delighted by this stand. Churches have been at the forefront of the campaign for fair-trade in developing countries and are now recognizing that there needs to be justice in our domestic markets. The two go together; both reflect the necessary move towards valuing our food more highly."

Jones concluded, "That doesn't mean simply being prepared to pay more, but taking a greater interest in where food comes from, and how it is produced. Local, seasonal produce will be healthier for us, for our rural communities and for the environment."

90 percent of West African Christians are also occultists

Marian Van Til

BENIN CITY, Nigeria – The CRCNA Prayerline is the Christian Reformed Church's online prayer request newsletter that anyone can sign up to participate in. The July 16 edition included this request from Back to God Ministries International: *French ministry leader Rev. Paul Mpindi reports that the practice of animism, voodoo and other mysterious cults are a serious distraction for the message of salvation. Please pray that the broadcast and discipleship ministries among the people in Benin may be effective, that nothing will hinder people from coming to faith in Christ.*

One day earlier, *Christianity Today* (CT) online posted a story on its website entitled *Dual Allegiance: Pastor jailed for using human head in occult ceremony.* CT's story by Laurie Fortunak told of a pastor in the very city of Benin, Benjamin Ojobu, and his wife, Patience, who were arrested in May for "using a human head in rituals for church members." The grave-robbing Ojobus are still in jail in Benin City, Nigeria.

Fortunak noted that "the practice of using severed body parts to ensure prosperity – whether material, emotional, or spiritual – is not uncommon in West Africa. In a region where voodoo is culturally acceptable, nearly all Christians engage in some form of occult practice, according to some experts."

Nigerian shaman

The fact that both of these items were published within a day of each other, the one from the CRC's French-language ministry leader, the other from the U.S.'s largest evangelical magazine, highlights the perniciousness of the problem. In fact, Benjamin-Lee Hegeman, a former missionary in West Africa who now teaches at Houghton College in New York State, gave CT this troubling statistic: "One out of 10 self-named Christians in this region practices only Christianity." Meaning 90 per cent combine Christianity and the occult.

Demonic insurance policy

Philosophically it's called syncretism. But it is a dual allegiance to God and other gods, "where Christianity is practiced in the daytime and occult is done at night," said Hegeman. He explained that many of the pastors actually preach that such dual allegiance is wrong but will nevertheless secretly take part in it. "There is the mentality, especially in African Initiated Churches, where the prosperity gospel is preached, that you do what you've got to do to get ahead. You rely on the powers available to you. You are hopeful that Christ will help, but when he can't come through on Sunday, you may take out a different insurance policy at night."

According to another news source, Benjamin and Patience Ojobu had bought the head of a recently deceased young woman for N3,000 (slightly under $25 Cdn) from a man who works at a local cemetery. Pastor Ojobu admitted that he and his wife were using the head "to prepare charms for fighting witchcraft and for offering special prosperity prayers." Nevertheless he still calls himself a "man of God" – he's involved in occult practices "outside church hours." He insisted, "I am both a native doctor and a man of God. This is my personal practice; I do it to complement my church job, and I have been assisting a lot of people with it."

John Abraham Godson, international facilitator for the Network of Nigerian Missionaries Overseas; told CT, "Often, in search of spiritual reality to overcome evil, many undiscipled Christians resort to seeking the help of shamans, while a few churches try to combine the practices with Christianity. It's always a power struggle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. As evangelicals, we cannot neglect the reality of either."

Can't stand up to disaster

The Christian Reformed Church of course opposes such practices as an unholy combining of paganism with faith in Christ: "A house divided against itself cannot stand," Jesus says. Surprisingly, not all churches in West Africa oppose these dual allegiances. Those like the CRC that do are fighting an uphill battle, said Hegeman. Whole societies have to change, he acknowledged.

"These types of practices only seem to crack when devastating wars occur," Hegeman said. "Look at Rwanda, Southern Sudan, and Liberia. Regrettably, the worst of disasters have had a purifying effect in the church. The very syncretistic could not survive – only authentic Christianity was able to survive."

Pray, indeed, "that the broadcast and discipleship ministries among the people in Benin may be effective, that nothing will hinder people from coming to faith in Christ."

Turkish authorities 'supported' murders of Christians, trial testimony claims

ISTANBUL/AMSTERDAM (BosNewsLife) – There was concern earlier this month that Turkish authorities were involved in last year's murder of three evangelical Christians at a Christian publishing house in the city of Malatya.

Open Doors, a ministry which aids persecuted Christians worldwide, says it has learned that a key witness, Metin Dogan, told a court that at least four influential politicians and officials were involved in killing the three Christians. Those killed were German Tilman Ekkehart Geske and Turks Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel. They were found in April last year, tied up and their throats slit.

Key witness Dogan said he was approached by the ultra-nationalist movement Ulku Ocaklari to carry out the murders with a knife. "If it's done with a gun, it cannot be arranged with the police," he was reportedly told. Ulku Ocaklari's chairman, Burhan Coskun, allegedly promised Dogan to provide two assistants, whom he was to kill after murdering the Christians.

More masterminds?

Dogan was also approached by three other men, identified as Mehmet Ekici, an influential local politician of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Namik Hakan Durhan, a former MHP member and parliamentarian, and Hikmet Celik, a retired major general.

Observers of the trial in Malatya said it was the first time that names have been mentioned of people who allegedly ordered the murders. Dogan himself did not murder the Christians, as he was reportedly already being detained for his involvement in killing a man who murdered Dogan's brother. Dogan is currently serves a 16-year prison term.

Prosecutors have suggested that the five men who are currently facing trial were not the only people involved in murdering the Christians, saying there was a high-level "complot" against the Christian publishing house. Two of the suspects have denied they knew Dogan and a court has ordered an investigation into the authenticity of his declaration.

Hard on the Christian minority

Open Doors spokesperson Jenö Sebök told BosNewsLife that he is concerned that Turkish politicians were possibly involved in the murders. "If that's the case it will make the position of minority Christians more difficult," he added.

The trial has been held amid growing tension and frequent shouting between prosecutors and the lawyers of the defendants. Lawyers even accused the Christian Zirve Publishing Company of being secretly involved in the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been blamed by Turkey for acts of terrorism. "Most likely lawyers are trying to influence public opinion by trying to make Christians look bad," Open Doors' Sebök said.

The European Union has complained that Turkey, an EU applicant,fails to fully protect the religious freedoms of its tiny Christian minority, which numbers some 100,000 in a predominantly Muslim population of nearly 75 million people, according to estimates.

There have been several attacks against churches and killings of Christians in recent years.

Canadian evangelist's 'healing revivals' draw critics

LAKELAND, Fla. (Christian Post) – The "healing revivals" of the last three months being held by a Canadian evangelist in Lakeland, Florida, are drawing criticism even from his fellow charismatics. His revivals have been described as akin to "Wrestlemania."

Todd Bentley says he has cured cancer, healed the deaf and even raised the dead via God's power, and Internet streaming sources have quickly increased his popularity online. More than 400,000 have visited his raucous revival tent, where the 32-year-old tattooed Canadian lays forceful hands on those who come forward for healing.

Though he gives credit to God, Christian critics say he rarely preaches the Gospel or even opens a Bible and focuses on the miracles more than conversion. Bentley defended himself, saying, "Miracles and healings are evidence, they are signs of the Kingdom, and if we don't have signs then all we have is a bunch of theology."

But Assemblies of God superintendent George O. Wood says, "Miraculous manifestations are never the test of a true revival. Fidelity to God's Word is the test.... Jesus himself said there would be many who would do miracles in his name and even cast out demons, but he does not know them."

In June ABC News's "Nightline" program broadcast an investigative report on Bentley, focusing on his faith-healing claims, finances, and criminal past. (As a teenager Bentley was charged more than once with sexual molestation.)

Following the report, Bentley's Fresh Fire Ministries released a statement announcing that Bentley was taking time off "to refresh and to rest" and that their Lakeland broadcasts on GOD TV would be put on hold. One week later God TV announced Bentley would resume the ministry and starting July 18 the broadcasts would continue.

Bentley has received criticism from other Christians for some of his doctrinal teachings, and many consider him a false prophet. Bentley says he has made several trips to heaven and has had meetings there with the Apostle Paul. He also says he had an encounter with an angel called Emma at an Assemblies of God church in 2001. He says the angel gave him a vision of gold dust, and afterwards he received a financial breakthrough. The Biblical basis for this has been questioned, but Bentley claims it was God's choice, and not his own, that an angel appeared to him in that manner.

Ascension

With gifts for our human comfort

When you ascended on high,
you led captives in your train;
you received gifts from men,
even from the rebellious–
that you, O Lord God, might dwell there.
Psalm 68:18

Abraham Kuyper

For a strong demonstration of power and its execution, one has to be close to the centre of power. Kings cannot rule their country from afar, from an isolated hamlet or far away village. They have to reside in their royal palace and be present in the assembly of their councillors. They must occupy the throne from where they issue commands and rule their subjects with proclamations and decrees.

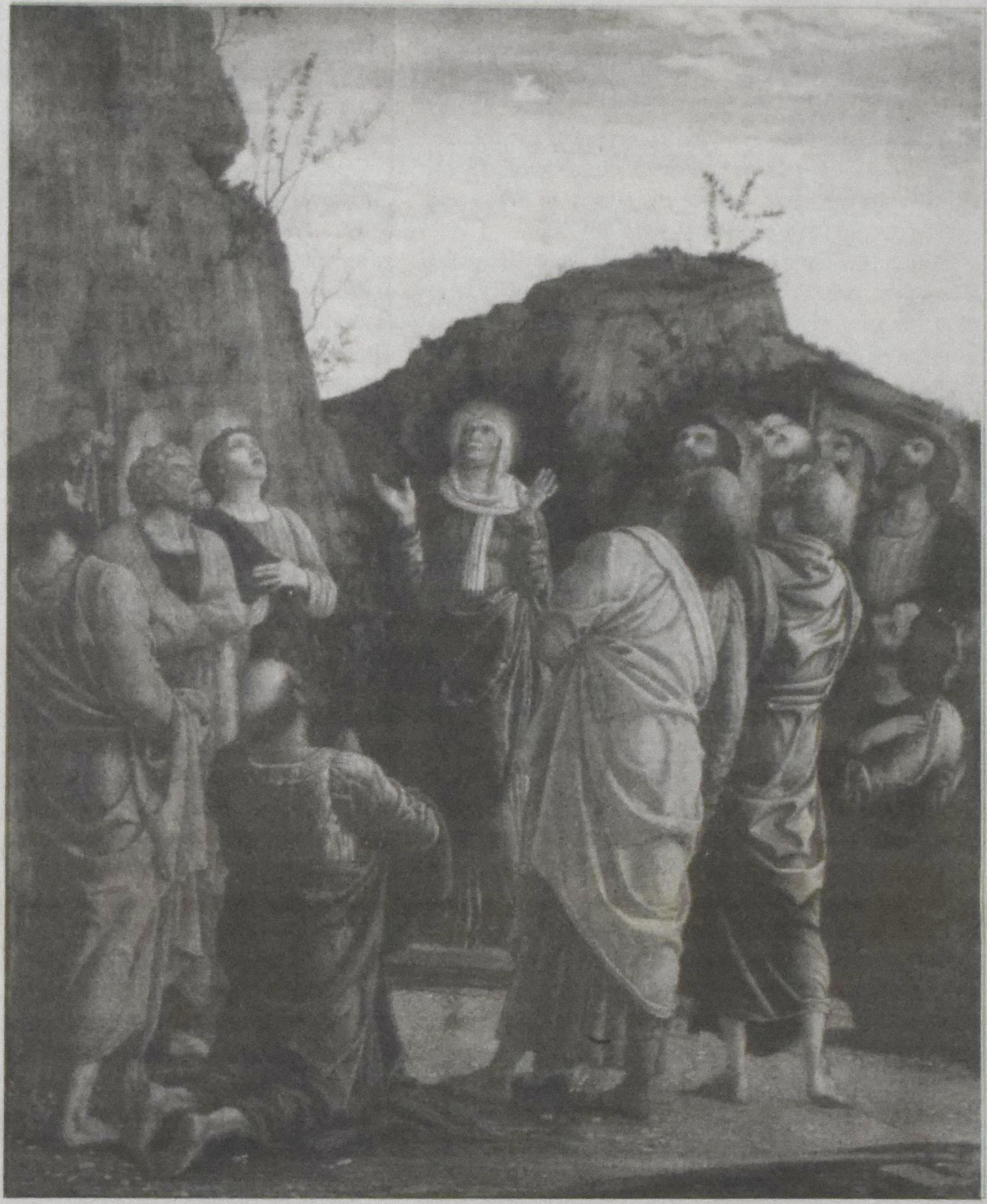
Similarly the captain of an ocean liner must stand strategically on the bridge, not somewhere in the bowels of the ship.

Again, as an enemy approaches, a general places his command post strategically near the front of the army to direct them in battle; he cannot hide in a remote fortress.

What we have said about the throne, or captain's bridge, or a general's quarters applies to any situation of power and command. To command the whole one has to be positioned strategically in the centre.

Thus, when we reflect seriously on the implications of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ as comfort for our soul, we must ask, "Where is the centre of the spiritual order of the world?"

Is the earth ruled from heaven, or is heaven ruled from the earth? Or, are they possibly like two ships passing in the night? In faith we respond, that heaven and earth are both ruled by the providence and counsel of God. *His throne* is in heaven, and all events taking place on earth are directed from there. In heaven all the lines that control events on earth are drawn together. The Word goes out and determines the course of history. You will not find the seat of government that determines the fate of heaven and earth anywhere here below. It is only found in the realm of eternal light and the abode of all majesty and splendour.



The Ascension *by Andrea Mantegna, 1462*

go into heaven." [Acts 1: 11]. Then a cloud hid him from their sight.

But no more than ten days later they were once again reminded of his existence when he, fully in charge and ruling from heaven, used his authority to send the Holy Spirit.

The apostles who witnessed his ascent told the story of his splendid ascension to their disciples in turn. The church listened to the story and passed it on in writing. Today we still know of this event from God's Word, the Bible.

So, each year the faithful gather to remember the drama of his glorious ascension. The church uses the occasion to *reflect* on their King Jesus. It also *sees* him once again ascending to his royal throne in heaven. It is a celebration of life and joy in his royal power.

There is more to this splendor.

The ascent to heaven was not only a glorious moment for the apostles; it also was a moment of sacred joy for the heavenly hosts.

Once this is clearly understood, we can address the second question, "Was the authority of that government handed over to Jesus or not?"

This question also can have only one answer. Indeed, all power in heaven and on earth was given to Christ Jesus. He was given a name above all names, so that at his name every knee should bow. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." [Ps. 2:6. KJV]

The Father has handed all things over to the Son, and so he must reign as King. "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" [Psalm 110:1].

To him is given all authority. It was transferred to him by the Father. He was anointed for that purpose. Because of the promise God had made, Christ received the crown as reward for his labours. Because our Mediator was appointed King, he also needed to be revealed as King. The title alone was not enough. It could not just remain a promise; real exercise of power was necessary.

Heaven and earth were both waiting for him to ascend to the throne, anticipating his word of power and the unveiling of his majesty. This is one more reason why the Mediator had to ascend to heaven. He could not remain on earth. The heavenly throne of glory was the only place in all creation where he could reside as divinely appointed King. If the authority of government was his, and the seat of government was in heaven, then he could not remain at a distance, but must hurry to be there and assume his rightful place on the throne. So, the ascension of our Lord is none other than an acceptance of his sovereign rule, and ascent to his heavenly palace, where he is ruling in splendour and glory. Regardless of his greatness, he could not have ruled the world from Jerusalem nor the heavens from any place on earth. The lines of authority were gathered not on earth but in heaven and from there he had to rule. He did not ascend to leave us behind in poverty, but rather to come nearer to us all as King of heaven and earth. As long as he remained on earth he was able to comfort but a *few;* only from heaven could he reach out and bless *all.*

The ascension of the Lord did not occur through the hidden entry way of death, but triumphantly into the eternal glory of heaven. Yet it was not a radiant public event that would blind the eyes of the world, for even in nearby Jerusalem no one noticed this glorious event. Likewise the Roman Emperor did not appear to have noticed it anymore than the people living along the Tigris and Euphrates. They all went on living as if the power over the whole world still belonged to earthly rulers. Only his church witnessed the stately splendour of his ascent. His church, represented on the Mount of Olives by the disciples, witnessed his royal entry into glory. They saw him fully alive and visible when he departed. They also saw the angels sent to comfort Jesus' friends. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him

Many centuries before, the Holy Spirit had inspired this song,

"Lift up your heads, O you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is he, this King of glory?
The Lord Almighty - he is the King of glory."
[Ps 24: 9,10]

Thus, in heaven above there was also an expectation of the returning king. The heavens were concerned about earth. The angels longed to see the mysteries of salvation [1 Peter 1:11-13]. They had welcomed our Mediator in the fields of Ephrathah, when he had left heaven behind; they had served him in the desert after the temptation of Satan; they had supported him in Gethsemane when he nearly succumbed; they had rolled away the stone so he could arise from the tomb; and now at his ascension they came to meet him. They went so far to meet him that those in the front lines were able to talk to the apostles. It is as if they received the Saviour from among the apostles and were taking him back with them to the very heaven, from which he had once come. The heavens to which he must return were ready for him, and waited for the manifestation of his glory. Once he had assumed the rule of heaven those in heaven too would rejoice over the fulfilment of the promise, and the realization of a most sacred hope.

Now he was becoming the king over Abraham, Isaac and

Ascension

Jacob; also over Moses and Joshua; David and Solomon; over all the witnesses and martyrs of God, as well as the seers and prophets.

Even so, that great day of God Almighty had not yet come, the day when Christ will judge all humanity, when 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." [Rev 11:14]. But this event was a wonderful anticipation of that day. When Christ entered heaven joyful songs of the heavenly host rang through all the heavens.

Jesus ascended as a human being. To be sure he remained the only begotten Son of the Father and of one substance with the Father. But he did not ascend in his divine nature, because his divine nature is already omnipresent; it did not go from place to place, and did not ascend to heaven, because it had never left heaven.

So, Jesus ascended as a man who had assumed our flesh and blood, which he had received in Mary's womb. The human being seen by the disciples as he ascended to heaven kept the very form that Mary had known from the day he was born. It was the same form in which he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and to John on Patmos. This was the form seen by Stephen and when he returns on the clouds, all will see him in that form [Acts 7:56].

That is a mystery.

In Paradise God gave dominion over the whole earth to human beings. But due to sin we lost that role of glory. Human power diminished and faded. The one who should have ruled became a slave to the mire of our egoistical passion and arrogance.

But what happened then?

Now, on the Mount of Olives, another human being, a second Adam, has recovered the dominion lost in the garden of Eden. And because of the work he accomplished he has been given dominion once again, not just over Eden and over the animals of the field, but a royal dominion over heaven and earth, and also over seraphim and cherubim. Even Satan and his hosts can make no move against his will.

But for whose benefit is this royal dominion that belongs to the man Jesus Christ?

The answer is: for all humanity!

The heavens are prepared, and angels don't need to be sanctified. The final judgement of the Last Day may be immediate for those who have departed in the Lord. Even the fate of Satan and his hosts is already determined. The only reason why the Lord still tarries is for us, for human beings. The fact that the Kingdom of Christ cannot yet be handed over to the Father, but remains in Jesus hands through all these centuries is to make sure that *no one will miss out*.

The Lord said that he was going to perform a mighty deed in heaven for, "I am going there to prepare a place for you" [John 14:2b NIV]. Not in the sense that he has to fix up a building for us, nor was it meant only for the apostles who heard him. The purpose of Christ's reign in heaven is not for the sake of the angels, but in order to prepare a place for all people called by the Father. Once a place has been prepared for the last of his people, Christ's reign will be concluded, as determined by the Father.

More than any other word, the word *comfort* sums up the depth of meaning of the ascension of our Lord.

He ascended to heaven with gifts for our comfort[2].

This does not mean that Jesus takes note of every sadness of our soul, to send comfort for that sadness. Of course our Mediator does that too, for he is rich in all kinds of comforts. But the deeper meaning of the text applies to the gifts of comfort which are designed to bring all human beings to live with him. Our Mediator hurries to relieve the needs of his people on earth, but he gives much more!

The gifts of comfort given by our Mediator relate to the grand and finished work of Christ who from his abode on high, governs all things in such a way that one person after another is uprooted from the mire of sin and unbelief and transplanted to the courts of the Lord where they grow like the oaks of righteousness or like palms and cedars.

Comfort is needed to relieve sorrow. The greatest and richest comfort must also be powerful enough to relieve our greatest sorrow. And our deepest sorrow is not due to some pain or loss or disappointment. *Our greatest sorrow is due to the bitter loss of our whole person and our entire soul into eternal death.* So also our greatest comfort is that our Mediator removes us from the path of destruction and provides for the salvation of our soul from death unto eternal life. You, who would have suffered in eternal death, have been saved by him. He has taken you to himself, so that you may now be counted among those who, with all the angels, will sing eternally in heaven before God's throne.

Footnotes

[1][Dutch: *The Lord of heavenly hosts (vs10)* and thus it implies clearly a triumphal entry into heaven, see ASV which has "Jehovah of hosts" – Kuyper used the words from the Dutch Psalter – JVM].

[2] Dutch Psalter uses the word "for our comfort" in relation to the gifts mentioned in Ps 68, stanza 9. See also Ps. 68:20-27, and Eph. 4:7,8, JVM.

Note: *This is part of a series of meditations by* ***Abraham Kuyper*** *translated by Jack van Meggelen.*

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

NOT PERFECT...but human

Finding that unique self is, as noted by Thomas Merton, the problem on which all our existence, peace and happiness depend. Nothing is more important, for if we find our true self we find God, and if we find God, we find our most authentic self.

David G. Benner in "The Gift of Being Yourself."

I believe we know some things to be *intuitively* true even though we may be told otherwise. Most often, I do not talk or write about this type of *truth* unless someone else raises the issue. Recently, however, there have been a rash of books written on the topic so I decided to bring it out of the closet.

There is a lot of emphasis lately on our search for perfection. This is not surprising considering our sanitized North American way of life with its home, garden, family and parenting magazines that portray personal attractiveness, fulfilling careers, ideal family life, glorious homes and luscious gardens to be easily within our reach.

Furthermore, Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as various contemporary gurus tend to believe we are able to reach a perfect state of bliss called enlightenment or nirvana. **Even certain strains of contemporary traditional Christianity teaches life** is indeed perfectible on earth in lieu of Christ's death on the cross. This leads the way for spiritual leaders to push for morally spotless perfection leading often to a lack of depth in personality development.

At the same time, while mainstream Judaism, Christianity and Islam suggests we are profoundly flawed and we will eventually reach perfection in the afterlife, they also stress the words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew "…Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

In response to our striving for perfection several authors have come out of the woodwork. Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel has written "The Case Against Perfection," Harold Coward has written "The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought," and out of Metro Vancouver comes scholar-poet Susan McCaslin author of "Lifting the Stone," and "At the Mercy Seat."

But it is Susan McCaslin who suggests Scripture may have mistranslated the word 'perfect.' She prefers the deeper meanings of the Hebrew and Aramaic word such as 'ripe,' or 'fully-flavored,' 'mature' or 'whole.' This concept makes much more intuitive sense.

In other words, our emphasis should not be on trying to become perfect but simply to encourage ourselves to become our true or authentic self as suggested by Thomas Merton. At the same time, I could not help but chuckle as I came across two writings on this topic. One is a slim Christian book by David G. Benner titled "The *Gift* of Being Yourself." The other is a lengthy article in *Psychology Today* which advertised on the front cover "*Dare* to be Yourself!" Still, all chuckling aside, to be authentic may be one of our deepest psychological needs we have – and the title of the Christian volume seems to suggest it is a gift but in reality it is no easy task.

The most important component of being authentic or real is to be *self-aware*. Especially, in terms of the amount of ego wrangling we have to do to contact our real self. Our biggest barrier is the rigid self-image we *ourselves* nurture but which in fact distorts life experiences and limits self-knowledge as we continue to live life in terms of how we think we *should* be rather than in terms of who we *are becoming*. To get beyond this, we must do the kind of soul-searching most of us want to avoid. But the words of Walter Wink can encourage us when he writes: the goal of life is not to become something we are not – divine (or perfect), but to become what we truly are – human. We are not required to become flawless, perfect, without blemish. We are invited simply to become human, which means *growing from our mistakes, learning by trial and error, being redeemed over and over from sin and compulsive behavior, becoming ourselves, scars and all. It means embracing and transforming our shadow side. It means giving up pretending to be good and instead… becoming real.*

At this point in time, I am sure some of us are asking what could this 'new and true self' look like? For starters, it is hard to describe but life becomes more rich and fluid. We become more open to experience without distortions, able to live fully in the moment, trust our inner experience more to guide behavior, and feel more free to *respond* rather than automatically react to life's events, as well as take a creative and loving approach to living, rather than relying on routine and habit. In other words, we can…finally…be as *free* as we can ever be on this earth – but also human.

The second question right now could be: how does all of the above relate to finding God while we are also finding ourselves? Hopefully that will be part of next month's column.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

Cycling

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

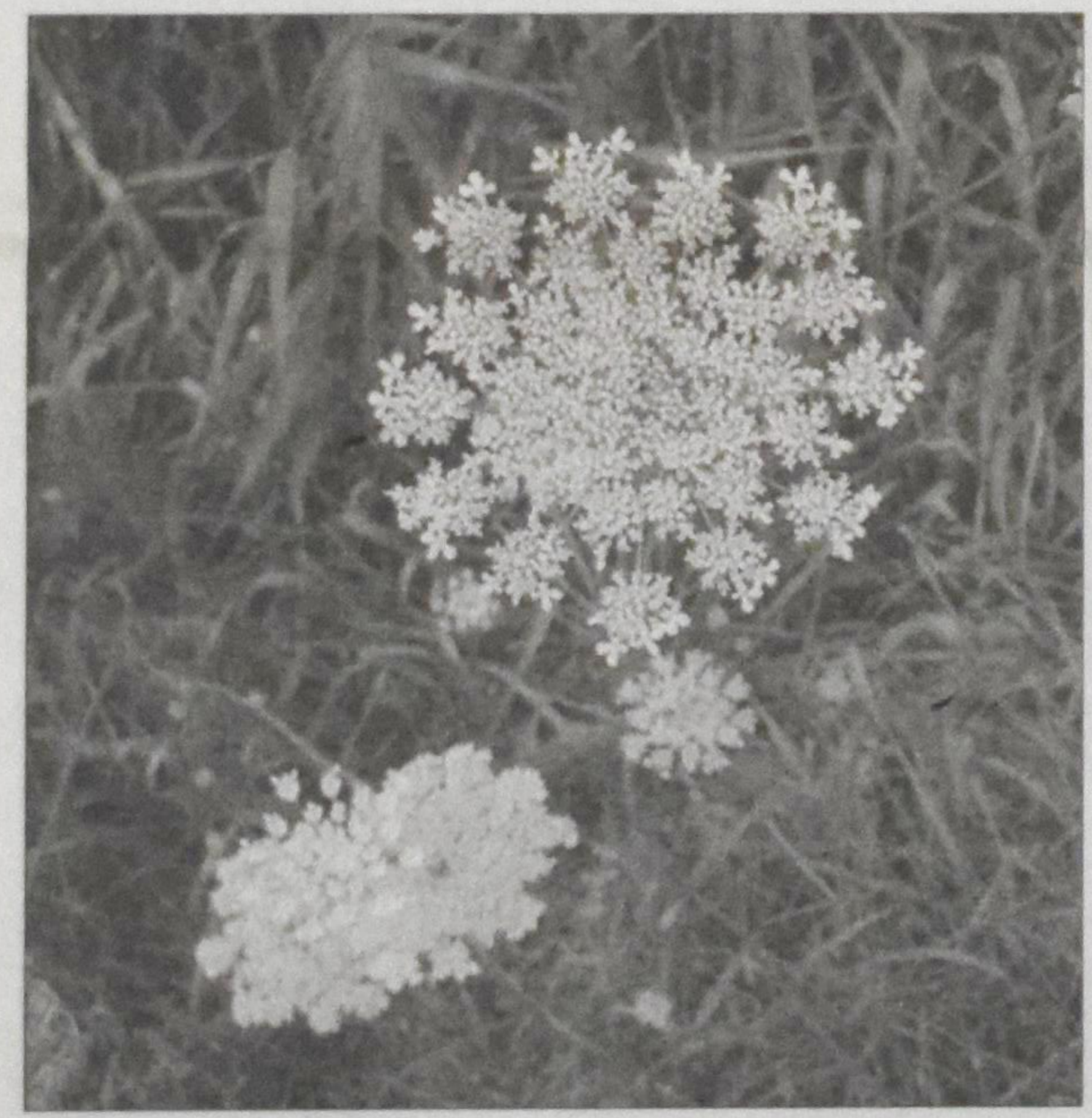
Life cycles

Waking up this morning I know I have a column due. So many thoughts and ideas and run-of-the-mill issues bounce around my head that I can't seem to focus on a single one to write about. After breakfast, devotions with Jack, the routine housework and critter care, I wheel my old bicycle out of the shed.

Unlike my shiny motorbike, the Raleigh looks like an orphan. A thick layer of dust coats the royal blue frame. Rusty splotches dot the chrome handlebars and wheel rims, and I haven't bothered to wipe away the cobwebs from the back carrier. Still, this bike is an old friend. I bought it secondhand more than twenty years ago. We've covered a lot of road together. I swing my leg over the seat and depart for my daily "forty minute vacation."

Ten miles on a country road can be incredibly therapeutic. Beyond the physical exercise I look forward to the mental relaxation the ride brings. No matter what else goes on in a day, once I'm biking, life takes on a whole new perspective. Traveling at this speed I can easily admire the riot of colors from the wild flowers lining the ditches, or monitor the progress of the cornfields along the way. I listen to the songs of the robins, finches and redwing blackbirds and inhale the scent of clover and fresh cut hay.

Gravel crunches beneath my tires as I ride over the newly refinished chip and tar surface. There's usually not much traffic on the Sixth, but today a transport truck hauling a load of round hay bales thunders toward me. He doesn't seem to understand that this is "my" road. (That's how I see it anyway.)



Unlike most drivers he doesn't even slow down as he rumbles past. I tighten my grip on the handlebars and duck my head to keep the dirt and flying bits of hay out of my eyes. I mutter a decidedly impolite description of the rude trucker.

Once the dust settles I return to happily counting plantain weeds, marveling at their statuesque dignity. Some tower more than six feet tall.

I spot a Mennonite woman stooping down to pick peas in her garden. The breeze ruffles her cotton dress. Two little fellows stand close by. The bigger lad is preoccupied with the wobbly-legged baby goat that nuzzles his pocket, as if searching for some hidden treat. The smaller boy, maybe three years-old, catches sight of me at the last minute and waves shyly. I wish I could take their picture, but the mere sight of a camera would intrude on the idyllic scene.

Toward the end of the road I face a few significant hills. Okay, so if you drove down this road in your car, your transmission wouldn't even flinch for them. But when you rely on pedal-power to conquer the inclines, you notice. My bike has ten gears, but I only use one: high gear on the big sprocket. Years ago the chain fell off a few times when I shifted between high and low range. Once I ended up walking home. Jack says it's fixed, but since then I've done things old-school. When I need more power, I stand up on the pedals and pump harder. My upper leg muscles tighten. I feel like a kid again. None of us had gears on our bikes back in the day, but we went everywhere on two wheels.

Cattle in a nearby pasture look up from their grazing, probably wondering if I'm going to make it to the top of the hill without getting off the bike. A couple of crows squawk at me from the pines of the Wellington County Forest. They have plenty to say every morning as I huff and puff past them. I'm not sure if they're cheering me on or laughing at me. Either way, it's an awful noise. No matter. I loop around the end of the road and start toward home. Where did this head wind come from? I pedal harder. The only thing I hear now is the wind in my ears.

Approaching the Mennonite farm on my return trip I see the mom still hard at work. The goat and his boy are sprawled on the lawn. I scan the yard for the younger boy. There he is – standing at the end of the laneway, peering down the road in my direction. As I get closer he bursts into a frenzied wave. The smile on his face makes me completely forget about the headwind. I grin all the way home.

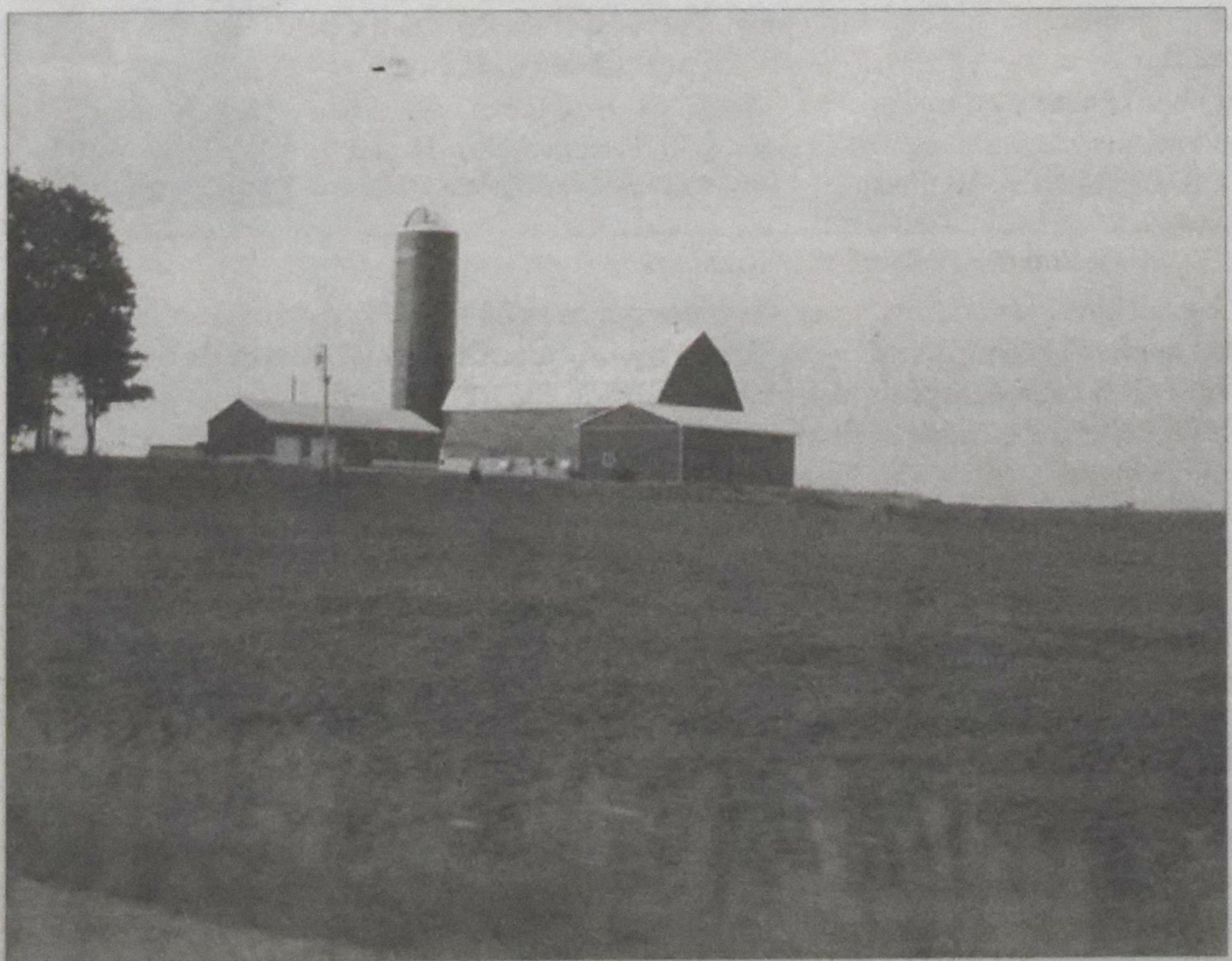
I think about the days when I used to bike with my kids. My twins, James and Stephanie, would ride ahead of me on their bikes and Jessica sat in a baby seat on the back of mine, where the rusty old back carrier is now.

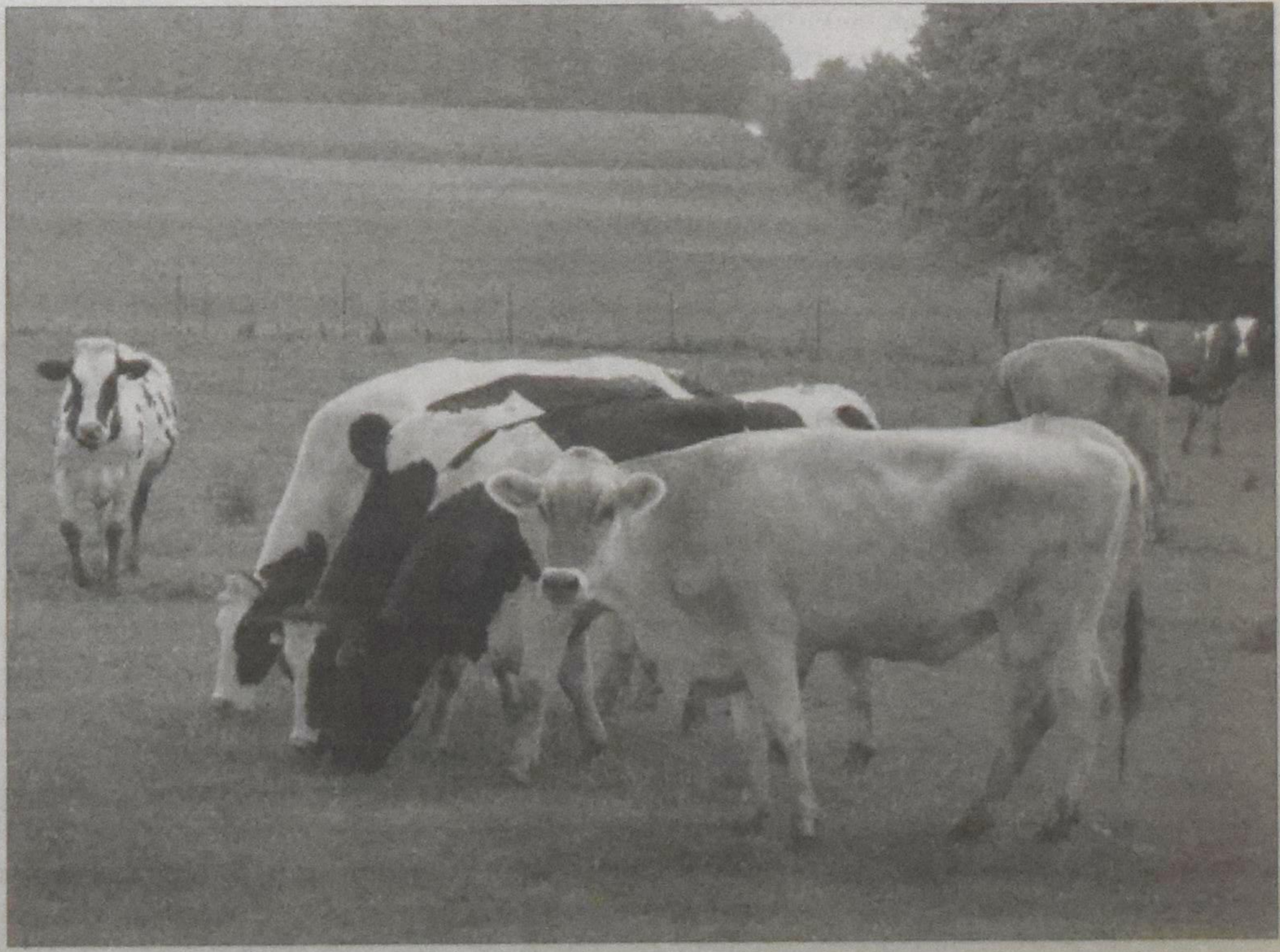
Who knows? I may soon go out and buy another baby seat. James and Willene arrived on Mother's Day with a potted geranium and a card wishing me a "Happy Grandmother's Day." Their first baby should arrive before Christmas. That gives me a little time to get used to the idea of being a grandma.

I gaze at the grainy ultrasound image on our fridge everyday and pray for this tiny precious stranger. What a wonder that God already knows him or her personally and intimately. No detail of this little one's life is a mystery to the Creator. All the days ordained for Baby VanderSlikke, his or her likes and dislikes, challenges and victories, joys and heartaches are already seen by the Lord's loving eyes. Amazing!

Rocky runs to greet me as I pull into our lane. Now I know what to write about this month. I'll try to share the splendor of this dazzling summer morning, and the marvelous sense of God's presence in every detail. I hope I can adequately express my thankfulness for a God who chooses to send headwinds or sunshine, each in due time, the One who ordains the cycles of life and remains faithful through them all.

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email: hmvanderslikke@ hotmail.com





Corinthians

Grace overcomes rebellion

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
I Corinthians 15:25

A. A. van Ruler

An essential and core part of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is Lord of the world, king of kings and Lord of lords. This is so because of his ascension.

Note: he is Lord of *the world*, not just of the church. The Lordship of Christ is not limited to those who acknowledge him and praise him. It extends over all and over everything.

It is this Lordship that the church proclaims. It does so confessionally and worshipfully. But if it would seek to limit the lordship of Jesus Christ to the church, it is signing its own death warrant.

The object of the living God is ultimately not the church but this world. He has created it from nothing, reconciled it with himself through the sacrifice of his Son, and finally will set it in the radiance from his eternal glory. Therefore, he must reign as king over all of created reality.

In this text Paul adds a new wrinkle to this truth by saying, He must reign as king *until* he has put all enemies under his feet. So there are enemies. And he rules over these enemies. This rule must also carry deep within it an element of combat. Through all the ages Jesus Christ is fighting his enemies. It is a continuous battle of life and death. This is the how of his kingship.

We might look for these enemies among people. Who of us, if he looks deep within himself, must not admit that he is by nature a wall of resistance to his grace?

But Paul has in mind the rebel powers that have seized hold in the world – death, hunger, meaninglessness, fear and many other powers that spoil God's good creation.

In any case, we are facing the puzzling reality of the rebellion of the creature against God. It is a rebellion and an enmity so radical and so bitter that the problem of evil again and again makes us dizzy. But God does not get dizzy. Yet, it is, in a manner of speaking, a handful for him. He is engaged in an endless and intense battle with his rebellious creatures. His creatures accrue guilt through their rebellion. And God wants to bring atonement for that guilt.

The parties to this conflict are not equal, but we must not say that they are in no way equal. We have a tendency to do so. We think that for almighty God it would be no big deal to swat down this rebellion by his creatures. But then God would trample over his creatures with a brutal and external force. This he does not do. He respects his creatures.

This reality created by God is a reality ruled by will. The core of creation is in the will. The creature can by his very nature rebel against God. Even in this God respects his creatures to the utmost. So mankind is not nothing over against God. On the contrary, he can stand over against God: he can make himself guilty.

However, the fact that the creature makes himself guilty in his rebellion demonstrates that the parties are not wholly equal. God remains God – also over toward rebellious humanity.

Paul indicates God's power very subtly when he says that Jesus Christ rules over his enemies as king. His battle is a form of rule. He is the first among equals. He is facile princeps, the ruler who easily overcomes. The struggle of history and human life is not a mere appearance. The creature's will is not rendered nil by the will of God. The hidden might of God with which God engages with his creatures must be sharply distinguished from that brutal, external might. It is a mystery that we must carefully honor if we are to persevere in the right way in this reality.

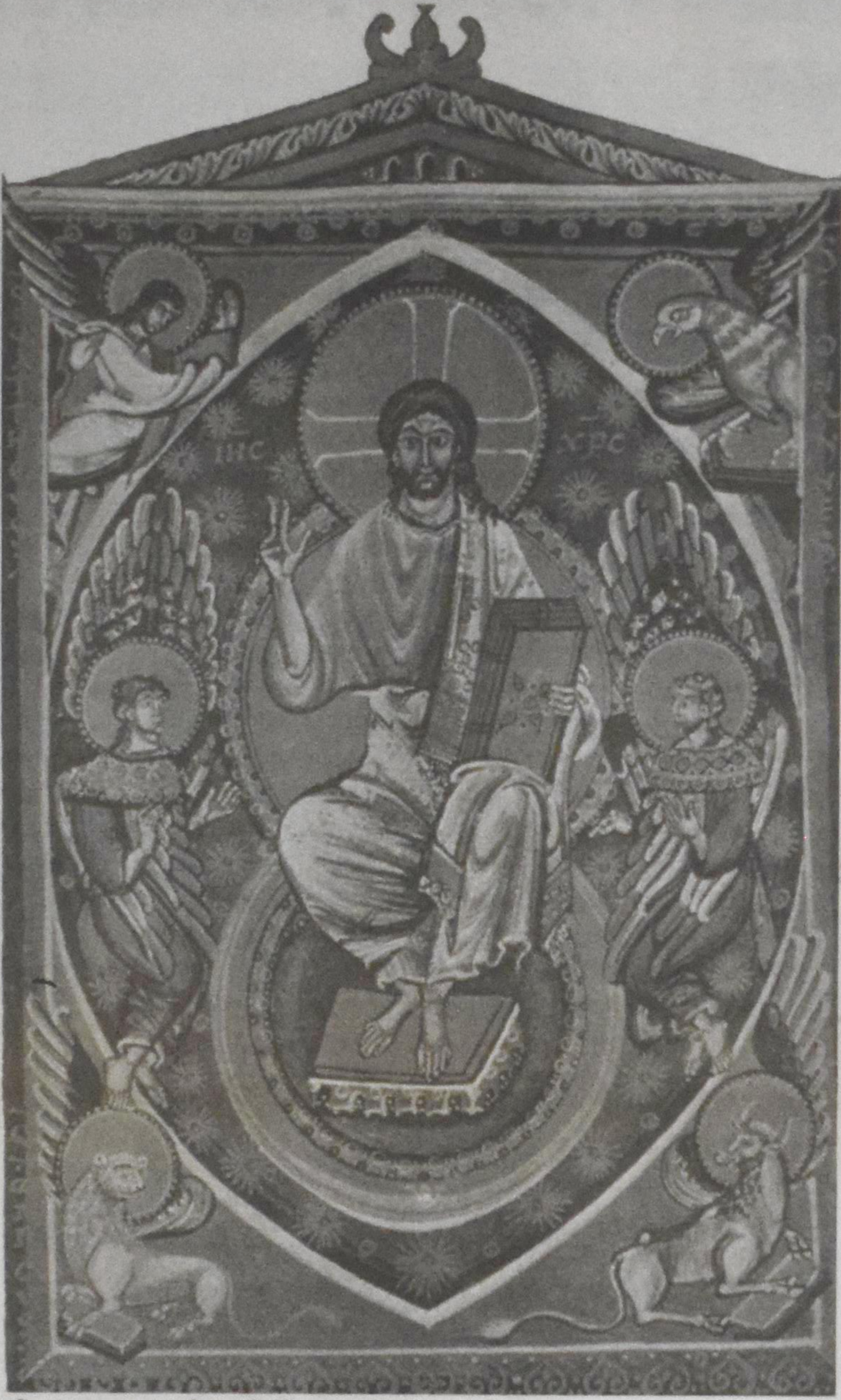
Things become even deeper when we recall that it is Jesus Christ of whom it is said that he must rule as king over his enemies. He is the crucified and risen one. He is the Lord of life. In him God poured out his grace. He rules from the cross. He rules with grace. In him God allowed himself to be overcome by his creatures unto death. In this way, in his gentle mercy, bearing and saving, reconciling and sanctifying, God is present in our enmity.

The atoning sacrifice is the great transformer through which everything passes. God's rule passes through it. And so does our enmity. This is why God deals so humanely with us. He does not trample us but he overcomes us from inside.

This is why we continue to exist, even in our enmity and lostness. God's will and our will – these are great mysteries. God's grace and our sins – these are even greater mysteries. We as his creatures accrue guilt and God atones for that guilt. This is the core of all that is and all that happens. All that happens on earth and in life happens christianly, which is to say, it happens in the manner of Christ, in the manner of the cross and the resurrection, of guilt and reconciliation.

This is how it must happen, says Paul: he must rule as king. "Until" – there will also come an end to this period of Christ's rule. But now we live in the forcefield of cross and resurrection.

All this is part of God's good pleasure.


Sacramentary from St Gereon, Colgne: Christ entroned. 980-990. Folio 15 Verso, Ms Lat. 817, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris

Mt. Carmel

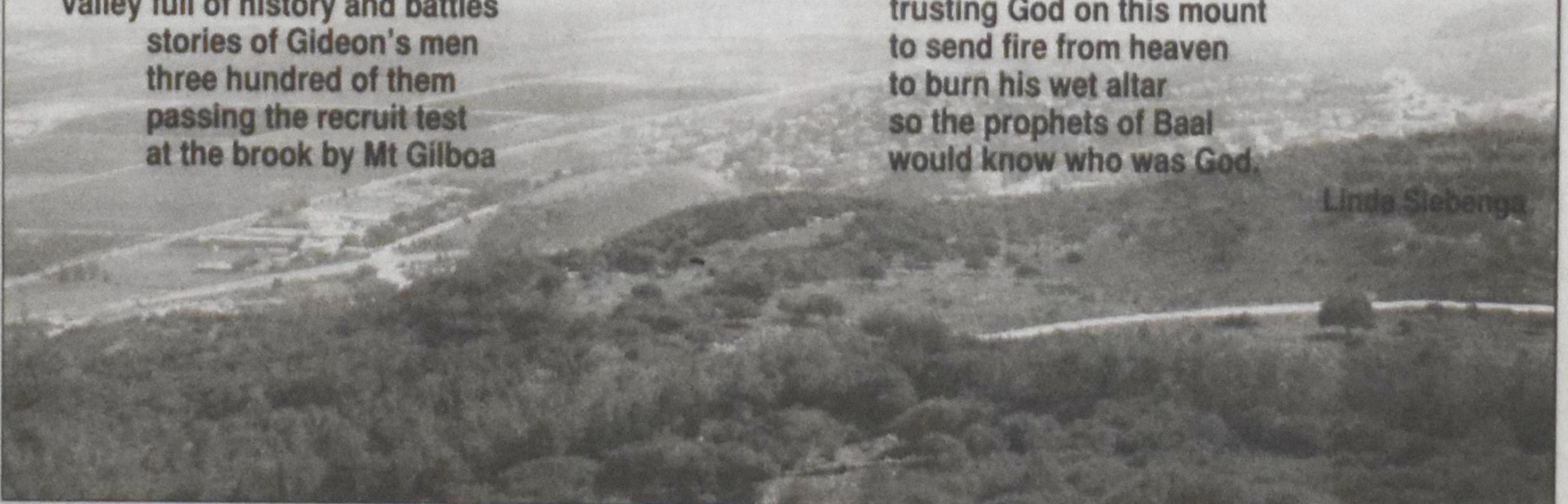
We stood on a high deck
overlooking the Jezreel Valley
surrounded in every direction
by a view Alice and I could have looked at
until the sun set she said.

Would the camera take home these green fields?
Stretching to Nazareth, Mt. Tabor and Mt. Gilboa
bread-basket of Israel
with clean-cut cities
white against the hillsides
valley full of history and battles
stories of Gideon's men
three hundred of them
passing the recruit test
at the brook by Mt Gilboa

Deborah prophesying the defeat of Sisera
by a woman
Naboth's vineyard tucked somewhere
in this valley
Moses and Elijah on the Mt. of Transfiguration
some say Mt. Tabor
Napolean's men nursed to health
in the monastery here

And Elijah
trusting God on this mount
to send fire from heaven
to burn his wet altar
so the prophets of Baal
would know who was God.

Linda Siebenga



Reflections

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

The offensive Gospel

Harper apologizes to native leaders.

Residential school group photograph, Regina, Saskatchewan

My morning Bible reading of late, coupled with a story that has been big news in Canada, is causing me to think about opportunities to "go into all the world and preach the gospel"; and about tragically botched attempts to do that; and about doors slamming shut as a result.

The big news story I'm referring to was Prime Minister Stephen Harper's public apology to the approximately 80,000 living Native Canadians who, as children, were taken from their families for eight months a year and sent off to Christian-run, government-funded boarding schools ("Indian residential schools").

For our American or other foreign readers who may not know, Harper apologized on behalf of Canada's federal government because, according to scores of the schools' former residents, the schools were pits of racism, abuse and mean-spirited corporal punishment which tried to "kill the Indian in the child" (as Harper quoted its being "infamously said"), and which left permanent psychological scars on students.

In part of his apology Harper said, "In the 1870s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal.... Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country."

Harper noted that most schools were operated as "joint ventures" between the government and the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United churches.

Inherently racist?

There's something about this situation that "doesn't compute" for me. My purpose here is not to rehash the residential school issue point by point, much less to deign to give advice about how Canada as a whole should treat its aboriginal peoples from now on. Nor, of course, do I wish to side with patriarchal, racist abuse. However, it appears to me that every one of these schools has been tarred with the same ugly brush. And that has an eternally serious consequence, as I'll point out below. Harper admitted that "some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools." But, also according to Harper, *those* students' stories have been "far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities."

Overshadowed, certainly. But outnumbered? Perhaps to critics it doesn't matter if some, or even most, students experienced the schools – and Christianity – positively. The schools' purpose – to inculcate Christian faith and (perhaps thereby) to help natives living in Third World conditions learn to function in the majority white First World – was inherently racist and paternalistic, and religiously malevolent.

An opposing view

In response to the text of Harper's apology, the CBC posted many dozens of comments on its website. One person, expressing an opinion very much in the minority on the site (and apparently in Canada as a whole), wrote:

"It is obvious to me that residential schools were not malicious evil places, and the people who ran them were not malicious evil people, and the motivation behind them was not malicious and evil, and that all of the current ills of natives are not traceable to the effects of residential schools. I have spoken to natives who attended them, and they described them as fun and happy places, and they were very glad to have had the opportunity to attend them.

"There were abuses, as occurs wherever people have power over others, and this is abhorrent as it always is, but the abuses were relatively rare. Also, some things which we now regard as abuse, such as physical punishment, were as commonplace in white schools as they were in residential schools. Much was sacrificed by caring people who did their best, and to tar them all in infamy now is wrong. This has nothing to do with the merits of the residential system, which viewed in retrospect I do believe to have been the wrong approach. But this whole thing has turned into an out of control witch-hunt with no one brave enough to defend the innocents."

I find it troubling that this kind of fair response was rare among the 50-or-so posts I took the time to read on the website. Many comment-writers did not seem interested in, or did not dare to look at, both sides of the story; for many there *aren't* two sides. Perhaps that's somewhat understandable. Beyond the issue of media saturation, if not manipulation, of this issue, the treatment of Canada's aboriginal peoples remains a thorny one, and presumably few people wish to be, or even to appear to be, prejudiced or compassionless in our multicultural age.

A far more tragic outcome

But there's a result from this situation that is far more serious – yes, truly tragic – than any results that have been stated over the subsequent weeks by the government, by the CBC's reports or by those of other news media I've seen. The evil deeds of a handful of people who called themselves Christians have inflicted significant harm on the Church of Jesus Christ in Canada. Those deeds – coupled with the now accepted societal view that *no* religious "proselytizing" is legitimate – may well have closed the door to the Gospel being freely offered from now on to hurting and hopeless people living on the country's reserves.

Because the four Christian churches which ran the schools with the government's blessing have been blamed for stripping the residential school children of their native culture, language and religion, Christianity is the looming bad guy in this sad story. I am not so concerned for those churches *as institutions*. Of course, nor would I for a moment defend any teachers, missionaries, pastors or priests who actually physically, sexually or mentally abused or demeaned native children in their care. I weep for such children, now adults: for their pain and for their having been led away from their Savior. It is ultimately the name of Christ that has been defamed.

Those teacher-missionaries were there to bring the Gospel to lost children (and their families) and to offer cups of cold water in Jesus's name. Cursed be those among them who led little ones – and the following generations – astray by acting on their own twisted desires. Jesus himself said it: "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matt. 18:6).

Only one answer

Let's be absolutely honest. The way and truth and life in this situation, as in all others in which we fallen human beings mire ourselves intentionally and unintentionally, was, and is, Jesus Christ – not native beliefs or the god and practices of any other religion. Our world, the whole cosmos, belongs to Christ. Some of the residential school leaders were by their deeds preaching false religion (such people are anti-Christ, says the Apostle John). But there's nothing saving, either, about any faith that leaves Christ out of the picture.

Reflections

In John 14:6, in the sentence that follows Jesus's declaration of himself to be the Way, the Truth and the Life, he brings that assertion to its conclusion, a conclusion that encapsulates both the comfort and terror of the double-edged sword of the Gospel: "No one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). But whoever wills may come! We who know and love the Savior can love our neighbors – in the North or wherever – in no better way than to lovingly introduce them to the Redeemer of the World. We will some day be held accountable by him for those who perish because *we* refused to provide the opportunity for them to walk through the narrow Door.

The Prime Minister's apology and the $10,000 to be given to each former residential school student will not salve self-described painful and meaninglessness lives, nor will it dissipate despair, nor evaporate the high suicide rate in native communities. God – Father, Son and Spirit – the only God who proclaims himself the Creator and Redeemer of all humanity and all creation, is the only one who can save them (and us), now and for eternity. That confession's "exclusivity" is now offensive to a large number of modern Canadians. That does not make it less true. Nor does it become less true because the three Protestant churches who planted many of the residential schools now decline to believe that Jesus is *the* Way, *the* Truth, *the* Life, and no longer send missionaries *anywhere* to preach the Gospel and gather in the harvest. Some who aspired to be workers in Christ's name in Canada's North in the last century failed miserably. Perhaps those who failed worked more for themselves or their church than for Christ.

Culture is not neutral

Specific instances of child abuse were not their only sin. Their critics say that the primary sin of the residential schools and those who ran them was cultural genocide: the obliteration of native culture, traditions, language and religion. This is a tricky matter. Was the *intent* of the Christian residential schools really to obliterate everything "Indian" about their students because the leaders believed that the majority white, European-based culture and its religion – Christianity – is inherently superior because it is perceived as white and European?

In the course of the history of the British Empire there were quite a few explorers and quite a few missionaries who apparently thought that way. They did not attempt to disentangle foundational faith in Christ from their own cultural traditions in which the Gospel had become encased. That's always a danger when we present the gospel to "foreign" cultures. We can't present it in a vacuum but we must be careful not to add cultural trappings in a way that causes those who need to hear the Good News to stumble. Nor, on the other hand, must we borrow wholesale from indigenous cultures and indiscriminately mingle *them* with the Gospel. Cultures are based on worldviews, all of which are, or have elements that are, antithetical to the Gospel because we are all sinners.

Lambs, wolves, snakes, doves

"There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail," said Prime Minister Harper in his apology. If by that he meant there is no place for attitudes of white racial and ethnic superiority or for taking abusive advantage of the young or those who need our help, then he's perfectly right. If he meant there's no place to present the Gospel as the powerful, healing and truthful Word of God because it is simply one of many "equally valid" religions, then he's deadly wrong.

When Jesus sent out, two by two, 72 disciples besides the 12, he told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2). He then gave them specific instructions, but the first thing he offered was a sharp warning: "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves."

What was true then is certainly true in our current situation. So we need to find a way, in presenting the Gospel to Canada's aboriginal peoples (and to all other Canadians who need to hear it), to be "shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.... The Kingdom of heaven is near."

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@roadrunner.com or via her website: www.wordpowerpublishing.com*

Unexpected rewards reaped from yard sale

Lisa M. Petsche

My family just finished conducting a big yard sale. We're exhausted, but feeling good because the proceeds are going to the Dominican Republic Educational and Medical Supplies (D.R.E.A.M.S.) project, in which my daughter is involved.

She's one of twelve successful candidates from her school who, along with two teachers, will be traveling in January to a remote mountain village in the Dominican Republic, to build housing. Ever since she received the news in June, she's been focused on saving up for the airfare and helping to fundraise the necessary $10,000 for the project.

Shortly after Sarah's announcement, my mother, full of pride and excitement, suggested we hold an autumn yard sale, anticipating we could raise hundreds of dollars if we planned it right. She and Dad offered to be the hosts.

With my father by her side, Mom co-ordinated everything over the next three months, including soliciting donations, arranging pick-ups, and sorting, cleaning, repairing, pricing and storing items.

The good news about charity yard sales is that donations are plentiful. The bad news? Some of it is pretty tacky stuff. (While one person's trash may be another person's treasure, some things are beyond salvage.)

We were fortunate to receive mostly saleable items – some quite valuable – since donations came primarily from people we know personally, who wouldn't burden us with junk.

The day of the sale, we arrived early at my parents' place to set up. My daughter displayed poster boards featuring compelling photos from last year's D.R.E.A.M.S. project. The most sobering one is a close-up of a flimsy, rusting tin shack, not much bigger than our backyard storage shed. Beside it is written, "No human being should ever have to live like this."

Despite the best-laid plans, yard sales can be unpredictable, from the weather and neighbourhood competition, to customer turnout and demographics, to what sells and what doesn't. Over the course of the day, though, under sunny skies, we sold a lot of stuff.

Packing up the inevitable leftovers was the hard part, as we were ready to collapse by then. We were thrilled, though, upon learning we'd surpassed our ambitious target of $500, netting $565. The remaining items are being distributed to local charities.

My daughter appreciates how everyone in our extended family helped out in various ways: donating items, collecting donations, growing plants and baking treats to sell, pricing, setting up, selling, babysitting the youngest members and packing up. Even my deceased mother-in-law contributed in spirit, since we included items from her recently sold house.

They say that when you give, you receive as much, if not more, in return. This certainly was true of our undertaking. It opened our eyes to the excesses of our culture – specifically, how much we North Americans own that we don't need and in many cases don't even value. Sorting through trip souvenirs, trinkets, knick-knacks, ceramics, plastics and other miscellaneous donations, my daughter commented, "There's a lot of (cheap/ugly/useless) stuff out there that should never have been made." She vowed to resist the impulse to buy such things.

On a more upbeat note, we were gratified to witness how generous people can be in supporting a worthy cause. (One customer surprised us with a cash donation.)

Most remarkable, though, is how therapeutic an exercise organizing the sale turned out to be for my mother, who's been living with illness and disability for over a year. The endeavour provided her with a much-needed sense of meaning and purpose, diverting her attention from her health problems. It also helped build her stamina and restore her sense of self.

Depressed for some time, she re-engaged in life as she telephoned people in her social network and visited antique dealers (for appraisal of select donations) and garage sales (for research), among other things. The yard sale project became a form of rehabilitation.

In giving, Mom ended up receiving in ways none of us anticipated.

Lisa M. Petsche is a mother of three and a freelance writer specializing in family life.

valentine
A Division of Merit Vacations

MARTINAIR
flights from 470.00
(book early), plus taxes
OAD **busreizen** for trips from Holland
Last minute sell offs, cruises, packages and air only
Wij zijn van alle markten thuis.
Mississauga 905-890-5333
or 1-800-268-6144
London 519-472-2700 or 1-800-265-1141
TICO Registration #4499356

Classifieds

Anniversaries

August 22, 1958 - August 22, 2008

Together with our children and grandchildren, family and friends

Henry and Margaret Eshuis

will celebrate with joy and gratitude their **50th Wedding Anniversary**

Their children: Sonya and Joe Bechard
Brad, Gabrielle, Monique

Jim and Jocelyn Eshuis
James, David, Danielle, Samantha

Mark and Maria Eshuis
Reuben, Ingrid

Jamila and Ken Axtmann
Brandon, Diego

Open House: Saturday, August 23, 2008, 2 - 4 p.m. at Trinity Christian Reformed Church, St. Catharines, Old Martindale Road

Our address after July 24 will be
50 Tanner Drive, Fonthill ON L0S 1E4

SOLI DEO GLORIA

1958 July 25 2008

Jack and Ann Hoekstra

celebrated **50 years of marriage.**

Although there has been deep earthly pain and sorrow; we live for God's everlasting Joy!

Love, your family and your many dear friends!

Address: 125 Delaware Ave
Chatham ON N7L 2W3

1958, Edmonton Listowel, 2008

My eye will be upon you...Psalm 32:8b

The children of

Ralph and Audrey Brus

warmly invite you to an **Open House** celebration in honour of our parents' **50th Wedding Anniversary**

August 15, 2008
at Bethel CRC, Listowel ON
from 2:00-4:00 in the afternoon
with a Liturgy of Thanksgiving at 3:00 p.m.

Your presence is our present!

John & Grace Brus, *London, ON*
Randall, Jody & Shawn
Helen & John Greydanus, *Listowel, ON*
Richard, Michelle & Clarence, Jason & Kara (Jakob), Stephen, Jeffrey, Kristen
Wilma & Kevin van der Leek, *Surrey, BC*
Ethan, Caleb & Katya
Bernie & Arlene Brus, *Ariss, ON*
Ashley
Gerald Brus, *Listowel, ON*
Elaine & Tim Beaman, *London, ON*
Carissa, Lynae, Matthew

Correspondence: 725 Wallace Ave S
Listowel ON N4W 3S8

1958 – August 16 – 2008

With thanks and praise to God

Lloyd and Karin Burghart

hope to celebrate their **50th Wedding Anniversary** on August 16.

Open House on
Saturday, August 9 from 2-4 p.m.
Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church
13 Wilholme Drive, St. Catharines ON
Best wishes only, please.

Home address: 13-159 Canboro Road
Fonthill ON L0S 1E5

Hank and Hennie Schaly

50th Wedding Anniversary – August 2008

Thou shalt not waste" was the unwritten rule in war-impoverished Netherlands. Hank Schaly's parents, as did their contemporaries, had this eleventh commandment encased in their bones. Hank learned very early how to forage, gather, and scrounge during those war years, stepping into his parents shoes and embracing this commandment with unswerving dedication. When WWII was over and Hank and his family of nine could return to their village, his father got a pig and his mother sent him out to be the family schilleboer – a person that goes door to door collecting table scraps.

The Schaly family emigrated to Canada in 1948, when Hank was just 13. He met Hennie Vandorp in 1955 "fresh off the boat", in Barrie Ontario. They married three years later. They rented many homes and had lots of babies.

When Hank, his wife Hennie, and their brood of seven boys and one girl moved into the first home of their very own, the eleventh commandment came with them. As with their previous rented quarters Hennie set forth again to tackle with paint, wallpaper, and fabric to create a gesellig home for her family. Outside, ever the gardener, she envisioned rows and rows of brightly coloured zinnias and marigolds, phlox and everblooming petunis, and of course vegetables.

Hank and his sons went to work foraging from the local dump and building supply dumpsters for likely looking materials. With his honed skill of making something from nothing, the house was soon furnished, as well as the first of many rustic tea houses.

Hank bartered the labour of removing the floorboards in Mr. Kiebert's 100-year-old log cabin for those boards. With these, he fashioned a rustic, but appealing twelve-foot table permanently stationed in the middle of the kitchen to help feed his brood. Room for everyone and a guest or two, which was often the case.

A three-decker bunk bed was made for sons Tim, Bob, and Ron in one room and a two-decker bed in another for Henry and Gil. As Walt was the oldest, he got the renovated attic above the back kitchen. The boys' bedroom carpets were painstakingly patched together from discarded carpet samples, to everyone's delight.

Until baby Johnny doesn't need a crib, we'll put him in with Marlene, our little moedertje next to our room," declared Hennie. "We're all set!"

"Not quite," replied Hank thoughtfully. "We've got the kids nicely packed into the house, but how will I ever keep up with feeding those ever-growing hollow legs?"

In a burst of inspiration, Hank went out to search for God's most obedient of animals, the pig. A pig, after all, implicitly understands the eleventh commandment. And as Providence would have it, one of the Christian School families were pig farmers, and the new home had a drive shed. Hank thought there was no reason the shed couldn't be renovated into a barn.

Thus, the first of many runt and otherwise indisposed piglets from the Barkema's was obtained. "No matter?" said Hank unperturbed. "So what if a leg is missing and if its insides are falling out, we'll just give it a tuck here and a stuff there and stitch the poor squealing piglet back together again. He did. And the piglets lived.

Now, how to feed these fine accommodating animals. Once a scrounger always a scrounger and Hank the schilleboer went off to search Belleville for the closest and hottest spot for food waste. He found "Belleville's Miracle Mart."

How could the Miracle Mart refuse when Hank, a respectable principal of the town's only independent Christian School, approached them?

"Could I take these food trimmings to help feed my pigs? I'll even break up the cardboard boxes so you'll have double the room in the dumpsters."

And so began Hank's ritual dofffing of his school jacket for his green canvas coveralls to delve into the prosperous world of recycled food. He created a small industry in doing so – helping out needy families as well as his own. In time the generous employees of Miracle Mart put boxes and boxes of perfectly edible food for man and beast outside the dumpsters for Hank to collect after school.

Hank continued to elaborate on his skill of filling every inch of space in his van in order to avail himself of this abundance of free food. Off on his expanding drop-off rounds, his enthusiasm was catching as he'd briskly come to a stop and hop out of his van with arms extended towards God's great bounty – his manna from heaven.

"Have a box or two – these plums would make a wonderful jam! How about a spaghetti sauce from these lovely tomatoes? Now, look at that pineapple! Cut off this bruise here and this bit of mold, there's lots good in that one yet," he'd say while quickly and efficiently filling a box. One week there might be a windfall of bananas. Right across town the families that benefited from Hank's generosity would be feasting on banana bread and pudding and sandwiches. Housewives would be asking each other in enthusiasm (or despair) "What else can be made from bananas?"

Finally the still great bounty would arrive home. Hank would switch hats from produce deliverer to farm foreman and get things on the move.

"Walter, you get the wheelbarrow and empty the compost and manure to the back garden. Gilbert and Ron, you help me unload and sort feed for the pigs. Henry, you get the wood shavings from the business across the road for the pig's bedding. Bob, you clean out the pig pen. Tim and John, you bring this good box of produce to the neighbors. Marlene you go help your mother." It bcame known to the army of sons that when their jobs were done, the words "What next?" were sweet music to their father's ears. Those two words would assure him he was training them well. Unfortunately Hank did not hear those sweet words as much as he would have liked, for these innovative boys would take turns attempting to discreetly disappear from their work regime.

"Now look at this box of produce, boys. This one's going to the house. Your mother will like this one. Just look at these fine brussel sprouts, beets and endive!"

The boys would look at each other over the wilted vegetables with less enthusiasm than did their father. With great care and a sense of romance, Hank would set aside the best fruit for his beloved wife. For isn't the scent of a juicy ripe pear equal to that of any red rose?

It did not take long for Hank and the children to add a handfull of rabbits, a few calves and a goat or two to the pig's quarters.

The piglets and rabbits were held like pets, napped with, fed, and sometimes just provided the children with another good ol' buddy to chew the fat with.

In the next ten years, Hank and his family matured close to sixty runt pigs in their drive shed, and not one died before the butcher was ready to turn them into bacon. In fact, the local butcher couldn't help but notice what fine, lean and tender pork they had, and he struck a deal that would last the decade. In return for half the butchered pig, Hank got beef – hamburger, and lots of it. "It has to be hamburger because my wife is a whiz at creating

umpteen varieties of hamburger dishes."

Hennie commanded her territory with as much dedication, order, and ingenuity as Hank did his. Meals were artfully created from what was brought home in the banana boxes that day. Jams and spaghetti sauces were dutifully made. Anything too spoiled and moldy was secretly disposed of. Her thoroughness would keep her family free from the potential discomfort of food poisoning.

Hank and Hennie continued through the years to feed and nurture many families with God's free bounty. Their eight children would all exceed them in height and would absorb the the mighty work ethic, but the scrounging gene had to forage for itself. Not all eight children got it!

Marlene Schaly

Address: Hank & Hennie Schaly
Box 116 RR 2, Calabogie ON K0J 1H0

Obituary

Trudy Mulder-Eisen (Nee: **Tjitske Alkema**)

Arum, Friesland Essex, Ontario
July 19, 1934 June 16, 2008

Suddenly, during morning Bible reading of John 3, the Lord called our wife, mother and grandmother home.

Trudy was predeceased by her first husband, John A.W. Eisen in 2001. Although much of their married life was affected by John's diagnosis with M.S. in 1964, they shared 43 blessed years in service of God and others.

Trudy is survived by her husband Henry Mulder. Together they enjoyed 5 1/2 wonderful years, traveling, doing volunteer work and giving hospitality to many.

Trudy is also survived by her children,
John & Jacqui (Eygenraam) Eisen
and grandchildren:
Kate & Dave Hagan
Nathan, Simeon, Tessa & Caleb Eisen

Trudy was happy to add to her family:
John & Angie Mulder
Doug Mulder
Rick & Brenda Mulder
Ed Mulder
Fred & Linda Mulder
Cathy & Neil Renaud
Bruce Mulder
their children:
Mike, Mark, Jennifer, Chris, Christie, Cara, Adam & Leah
and their grandchildren:
Sylvie & Jett

Everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.
John 3:15

Correspondence:
Henry Mulder
240 Irwin Ave
Essex ON N8M 2T6

John & Jacqui Eisen
22 Spencer St
Welland ON L3B 3W2

Classifieds / Job Opportunities

Personal

Widowed gentleman in Southern Ontario, wishes to correspond with lady in her 50's or early 60's. Looking for friendship, companionship, and possible marriage.
Reply to File ***2764***
Christian Courier
5 Joanna Dr
St Catharines ON L2N 1V1

Vacation Rentals

For rent, by weekend or week 2+1 Br. Bungalow in beautifull **Grimsby** Ontario – gateway to Niagara and the heart of wine country. Close to Niagara Falls, St. Lawrence Seaway, one hour to Toronto.
Call 1- **905-309-2268**
or E-mail colyn@sympatico.ca

Holiday in Holland

Beautiful self-contained cottage in **Friesland**
www.chestnutlane.nl

Cochrane, Ont.
Cozy cedar log cabin for rent by the night or weekly, ($50. per night) Living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, bathroom with shower, etc.
Phone Ada Struyk at **705-272-6169**
or email cmstruyk@puc.net

For Rent

St. Catharines – Room in shared house with other young adults. Ideal for students. Close to QEW, Fairview Mall and on bus route. 350/mo inclusive.
Phone Anita at 289-407-0326

Dunnville, Ont.
3 bedroom country home minutes away from church and school. Asking $900 a month.
Please call **905-774-3624**

Job Opportunities

INGLEWOOD CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH
is currently seeking a

Director of Youth and Intergenerational Ministry

with a heart for teenagers and young adults and a vision of promoting discipleship and congregational fellowship and care. (Ordained or not ordained)
For more information, please contact
Inglewood CRC at (780) 455-1066,
12330 - 113 Avenue, Edmonton AB T5M 2W4
or email **inglecrc@telusplanet.net**

Shalom Manor & Gardens

SHALOM MANOR
a Christian long-term care home, is currently seeking applications for the positions of

Registered Nurses
and Registered Practical Nurses

If you are interested in working in a Christian setting, caring for elderly Dutch-Canadian residents, we invite you to submit your resume by mail, fax or email to the
Director of Care
12 Bartlett Ave
Grimsby ON L3M 4N5
Fax: (905) 945-1211 Email:info@shalommanor.ca
Ability to communicate in the Dutch language is an asset.

Christian Fellowship
Autumn Glory Motorcoach Tour
October 7-8, 2008

Fully escorted scenic tour to Midland. Includes visit to the national historic site of Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons, Luncheon Cruise, Outdoor Mural Tour, daily devotions, singalongs. Pickups in Hamilton, Grimsby, Jordan. Cost: $299, incl. taxes.

For details on these and other tours, contact
Mary de Jonge at 905-988-3882 or uppercan@mergetel.com

Verstraete Travel, 36 Secord Dr, St. Catharines Ontario L2N 1K8
Ph: (905) 934-4414 or 1-800-405-6088
Ont. Reg. 424511

De Nederlandse COURANT

North America's oldest and most published Dutch language paper and exclusive aftermarket distributor of the Libelle and Margriet magazines in its 55th year of publication.

SPECIAL NEW SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

De Nederlandse COURANT: ❑ 1 year $15.00 (regular $33.00)
❑ 2 years $40.00 (regular $62.50)

❑ **Margriet or** ❑ **Libelle with De Nederlandse COURANT:**
❑ 1 year $125.00 (regular $160.00)
❑ 2 years $220.00 (regular $280.00)

Name:______________________
Address:______________________
City:______________ **Code:**______________
Phone:______________ **E-Mail:**______________

Mail coupon with your cheque to:
De Nederlandse COURANT
2110 Hunt Crescent, Burlington ON L7M 2N9

See our website for recently advertised job opportunities, issue dates, deadlines,contact information and more.
www.christiancourier.ca

A Unique opportunity for a unique individual

Director of Care – Residential Care

Elim Village is a developing comprehensive Christian seniors community located on 20 acres in Fleetwood (Surrey) B.C. A not for profit charitable organization, Elim Village offers a unique opportunity to be a part of a working environment that embraces Christian principles and beliefs and pursues the highest standards in business and care operations. Our approach is integrative and team oriented; founded on our core values which emphasize the value we place on our relationships with residents, staff and stakeholders.

Reporting to the Director of Operations the Director of Care (DOC) is a key member of the management team responsible for leading all aspects of care in our 118 bed residential care home scheduled to open in early 2009.

Our DOC possesses a unique skill set that combines compassion and care for our resident's with strong leadership abilities in providing direction, support and guidance to a team of professional care providers. In addition you will have the ability to establish and maintain effective communication with residents, families, and fellow staff members as you work collaboratively within a team environment. Respect for and adherence to the work environment established by Elim Christian Care Society is a job requirement.

ELIM Village

Requirements:
- Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree or equivalent
- Current registration with the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia
- 3-5 years of management experience in healthcare – preferably in the residential care environment
- Demonstrated experience with financial, accounting and budgetary functions
- Excellent leadership, mentoring and inter-personal skills
- Progressive, innovative and forward thinking mindset
- Personal commitment to Elim Statement of Faith

Join a dynamic team
in the management and future development of Elim Village – a complete Campus of Care where residents can Age in Place within their community.

To learn more about this fantastic opportunity please contact:
Ron Pike
Director of Operations
Elim Christian Care Society
9080-159th Street
Surrey BC V4N 5T6
phone: 604-584-7587 ext 2020
e-mail: rpike@elimvillage.com

Elim Investment Opportunities

Promissory Notes

Bonds – Sold Out

This is not to be construed as an offer to solicit investments and no investment can be made until the Investor has received an Information Statement issued by Elim Housing Society.

Established by the Elim Housing Society in 1995, Elim Village is located on 20 acres in the heart of Surrey's Fleetwood area. Based and operated on Christian principles, Elim's vision is to provide various levels of quality care for seniors.

Today, over 400 people call Elim home and are able to enjoy the benefits of living within a caring Christian retirement community. As part of Elim's ongoing successful financial strategy, we offer a variety of investment opportunities. Our rates are determined by the Royal Bank of Canada's prime rate.

We currently offer **Royal Bank of Canada's prime plus 1%** (not to exceed 7%)

On June 17th, 2008, Elim Investments were accruing interest at **5.75%**

ELIM Village

For more information regarding investment with Elim Village, contact **Terry-Lynn Dryfhout** at **tld@elimvillage.com** or call **778.996.7755**
Visit our website at **www.ElimVillage.com**

A Christian Retirement Community

Advertising / Job Opportunities

Classifieds

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION
Christian Courier is published on the second and fourth Monday of each month. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Wednesday, 12 days prior to publication date.
RATE: (GST added to rates listed) All family announce-ments: $6.00 per square inch.
rose@christiancourier.ca
Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: $8.00 per square inch.
email: **ads@christiancourier.ca**
PHOTOS: There is a fee of $25 for including a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged per square inch but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.
PERSONAL ADS: *Christian Courier* would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is $25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at $8 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.
NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS:
We offer a $25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in *Christian Courier* and to parents who announce a child's birth in our paper. If you want to take advantage of this offer, please let us know when placing your ad.
SUBMITTING YOUR AD e-mail: see above
Mail: Christian Courier
5 Joanna Dr
St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
OTHER INFORMATION: *Christian Courier* reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style and is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements.

★ 38 YEARS OF SERVICE ★

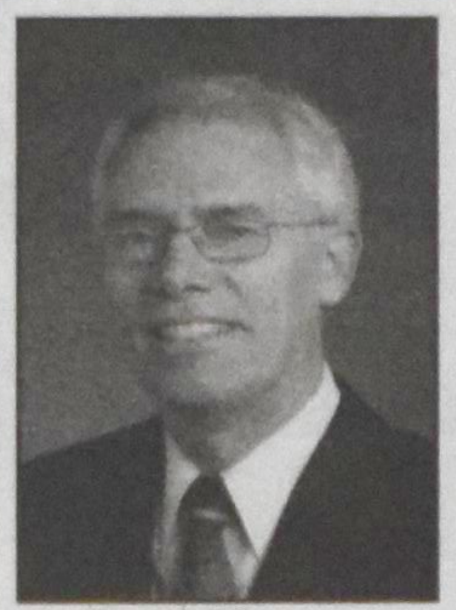
CRC EXTENSION FUND

"...serving Christian Reformed churches and Christian schools since 1970"

Your funds will be invested in Christian Reformed Church and Christian school building projects in Canada.

RATES TO Sept 30, 2008
We pay **4.5%** on CRC deposits.
Earn approximently **4.6%** on RRSP/RRIF

Write: Christian Reformed Extension Fund
45 Harriet St, Toronto ON M4L 2G1
Fax: 416-465-6367 **Call: 416-461-1207**



Fred Hagen
Broker of Record

FRED **HAGEN** Realty LTD., BROKERAGE

905-388-9555

Providing personal, professional real estate service in the Hamilton area for over 28 years.

Email: hagen@fredhagenrealty.com
www.fredhagenrealty.com

Arie Hoogerbrugge
Associate Broker

RE/MAX Del Mar Realty Inc.
860 Queenston Road
Stoney Creek, ON L8G 4A8
Bus: **905-662-5300**
Res: **905-945-3506**
E-mail: arie@remaxdelmar.com
Website: www.houseplus.com/ariehoogerbrugge

REDEEMER
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Put your investment to work for a wonderful Kingdom cause!

Competitive Rates - 4.00% to 4.30%*
5 Year Term
Interest paid semi-annually

Current rates subject to change

For Information Call: 1-877-779-0913 ext. 4205

*Other rates apply for RRSP/RIF plans

777 Garner Road East
Ancaster, ON L9K 1J4
www.redeemer.ca

Tel: 905-648-2131
Fax: 905-648-2134
stewardship@redeemer.ca

Low interest rates getting you down?
If you're over 65, have you considered a **charitable gift annuity**?

- Wonderful income - as high as 10%
- Largely tax exempt
- An charitable receipt for at least 20% of the annuity amount.
- This lasts as long as you live
- Worry free
- Benefits the charities of your choice

Never heard of a gift annuity? Call for a no-obligation quotation or have a child or grandchildren call on your behalf.

Link Charity Canada Inc.
45 Harriet St. Toronto M4L 2G1
Ph: 1-800-387-8146
Fax: 416-465-6367
www.linkcharity.ca Email: info@linkcharity.ca

BUSINESS and SERVICE DIRECTORY

Re/Max Escarpment Realty Inc.
Mark Nyman
304 Wilson St. E, Unit #11
Ancaster, ON L9G 4S4
905-304-3303

Email: marknyman@remaxescarpment.com

CALVIN
MINDS IN THE MAKING
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan
1-800-688-0122
www.calvin.edu

CANADIAN CHRISTIAN BUSINESS FEDERATION
970 Bonnieview Ave
Burlington, ON L7T 1T5
Ph: 905-522-8602
Fax 905-524-1203
J Hans Vander Stoep Executive Director
jvstoep@ccbf.org
CCBF activities listed on our Web-site
www.ccbf.org

Ontario Plywood Specialties (1987) ltd
- PLYWOOD
- PANELLING
- TRIM
- MOULDINGS
- DOORS

257 Cent. Pkwy N Hamilton, ON L8E 2X3
John Ouwehand • Syd Grypstra
Ph: 905-561-3576 Fax: 905-561-3581

DUTCH TOKO
European Imports
118 Wyndham St. N. Guelph
519-822-4690
Mountain Plaza Mall, Hamilton
905-383-2981

Hulse & English
Funeral Home
75 Church St. St. Catharines
905-684-6346 - 24 Hours
IAN H. RUSSELL
DAVID WALPOLE - Managing Director
Serving the community over150 years

INSURANCE SOLUTIONS
BARRY VAN ZOEREN,
C.A.I.B.
ALBERT VAN REEWYK INSURANCE BROKERS LTD

409 Dundas St. W.
Belleville, ON K8P 1B6
Ph: 613-968-4576
Fax: 613-968-2356

499 Dundas St. W.
Trenton, ON K5V 6C4
Ph: 613-965-1993
Fax:613-965-1252

GARY VAN EYK, CMA
Certified Management Accountant
50 Lakeport Rd. Ste 201
St. Catharines
ON L2N 4P7
CMA MEMBER
Email: garyvaneyk@bellnet.ca
Bus: 905-646-7331 Fx: 905-646-0951

ADA REALTY LTD.
Sid Vandermeulen
Suite 404, 2011-137 Ave.
Edmonton AB T5A 4W2
Tel: 780-473-8149

RAMAKER'S IMPORTS INC.
We specialize in
DUTCH FOOD / CHEESE /
CHOCOLATE / TEXTILES & GIFTS
579 Ontario St.
St. Catharines
Ontario L2N 4N8
Fax: 905-934-3344
Tel: 905-934-6454
E-mail: linde_ramaker@cogeco.ca

BCE selling for $42.75
BCE
Consider a gift of all or part of your shares.
Full charitable receipt AND no capital gain tax.
Need help to get this to your favourite charities?
Contact **Link Charity Canada Inc**
1-800-387-8146 www.linkcharity.ca

Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - 2008

Aug 17 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching.

Sep 23 Organ recital featuring Stephanie Burgoyne (ARCCO) and William Vandertuin (solo and organ four hands) at St. Paul's Cathedral, **London**, 12 noon. (wvan08@rogers.com)

Oct 4 Get Connected partnership Banquet hosted by CRC campus ministries, Uni. of Guelph & Uni. of Waterloo/Laurier. Banquet 6:30 -9:00 at the Drayton CRC. Contact: Eve Mazereeuw emazereeuw@gmail.com or 519-827-1753 Ad to follow in upcoming issues.

Nov 6 Organ recital featuring Stephanie Burgoyne (ARCCO) and William Vandertuin (solo and organ four hands) at Trinity Anglican Church, **Cambridge**, 12:15 p.m. (wvan08@rogers.com)

Nov 8 Trillium Leaque Reunion (Ontario) If you were involved in Trillium League Youth during the years of 1975 and 1982, you are invited to reminisce & reconnect on Saturday, November 8 from 4-9 pm at Community Christian Reformed Church in **Kitchener**. Be sure to inform any former trillium leaguers. For details go to www.trilliumleaguereunion.com or email Phia (Hoogendoorn) Howes at phia@sympatico.ca or call 519-699-5942

faith seeks understanding

YOU ARE INVITED TO

"GET CONNECTED"

PARTNERSHIP BANQUET

HOSTED BY

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CAMPUS MINISTRIES

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

UNIVERSITIES OF WATERLOO/LAURIER

Don't miss this wonderful opportunity

- Enjoy stories & music by students
- Meet Brian Bork, new Campus Minister at Waterloo/Laurier
- Connect with Jamie VanderBerg, Campus Minister at Guelph
- Catch the vision of campus ministry
- Support campus ministry with your gifts

Saturday, October 4, 6:30 - 9:00

Drayton Christian Reformed Church (88 Main St. E.)

Tickets – $20. Deadline – September 20.

Grade 11 & 12 students come free but must RSVP

Really interested? Sponsor a table of 8 for $160 and invite others to hear for themselves what God is doing through campus ministry.

Ticket & Table Sponsor Contact: Eve Mazereeuw (emazereeuw@gmail.com or **519-827-1753**)

ROSS & McBRIDE LLP

LAW FIRM

DAVID A. VAN DER WOERD

Commerce Place, 1 King St. West

Mail: P.O. Box 907

Hamilton, ON L8N 3P6

Ph: 905-526-9800

Fax: 905-526-0732

Direct: 905-572-5803

dvanderwoerd@rossmcbride.com

SHALOM MANOR RETIREMENT APARTMENTS

12 Bartlett Ave
Grimsby ON L3M 4N5
(905) 945-9631 ext 1152
(905) 945-1211 fax
www.shalommanor.ca
info@shalommanor.ca

If you are looking for a dignified retirement living in a gracious Christian environment, then you have found the right listing.

Our suites offer spacious accommodation, personal independence, panoramic views from the balconies, and recreation programs. All apartments are meal and service plan inclusive with 24 hour nursing supervision, secure entry and nurse call bell features. Each suite has a fully equipped kitchenette. Our main floor offers a general store, coffee shop, auditorium and spacious courtyard and terrace.

Call us for a tour and a complimentary lunch.

THE BACK TO GOD HOUR

Radio- From Coast to Coast

3475 Mainway PO Box 5070 Stn LCD1 Burlington ON L7R 3Y8 **Web: www.backtogod.net/**

BRITISH COLUMBIA		
Burns Lake – CFLD	9:15 am	1400
Osoyoos – CJOR	8:00 am	1490
Prince George – CIRX	7:00 am	94.3
Princeton – CHOR	8:00 am	1400
Smithers – CFBV	9:15 am	1230
Vernon – CJIB	9:30 pm	94
ALBERTA		
Brooks – CIBQ	8:30 am	1340
Edmonton – CJCA	6:00 pm	930
MANITOBA		
Winnipeg – CKJS	9:00 am	810
ONTARIO		
Atikokan – CFAK	9:30 am	1240
Chatham – CFCO	6:30 am	630
Hamilton – CHAM	7:30 am	820
London – CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Owen Sound – CFOS	7:00 am	560
Sarnia – CHOK	7:30 am	1070
Stratford – CJCS	8:45 am	1240
Wingham – CKNX	10:30 am	920
Woodstock – CJFH	7:30 am	94.03
NEW BRUNSWICK		
Saint John – CHSJ	9:00 am	94.1
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND		
Charlottetown – CFCY	7:00 am	630
NOVA SCOTIA		
Digby – CKDY	6:00 am	1420
Halifax – CFDR	8:30 am	780
Liverpool – CKBW	7:30 am	94.5
Kentville – CKEN	8:30 am	1490
Middleton – CKAD	8:30 am	1350
Shelburne – CKBW	7:30 am	93.1
Sydney – CJCB	7:00 am	1270
Weymouth – CKDY	8:30 am	103.1
Windsor – CFAB	8:30 am	1450

TELEVISION - ***PRIMARY FOCUS***

AB Lethbridge – CJIL Thurs at 9 pm.
BC- OMNI - Sunday 4 pm
TBN (Trinity Broadcasting Network)

Kids Corner Radio

ALBERTA		
Drayton Valley CIBW 92.9 FM		Sun. 8:30 am
High River/Calgary CHRB 1140 AM		Sun. 4:30pm
Nordegg CHBW 93.9 FM		Sun. 8:30 am
Rocky Mtn.House CHBW 94.5 FM		Sun. 8:30 am
BRITISH COLUMBIA		
Prince Rupert CIAJ 100.7 FM		Sat. 10 am
MANITOBA		
Steinbach CHSM 1250 AM		Sun. 4 pm
NOVA SCOTIA		
Bridgewater CKBW 1000 AM		Sun. 5:30 am
ONTARIO		
Oshawa CKDO 1350 AM		Sat. 8 am
Woodstock CJFH 94.3 FM		Sat. 8 am
SASKATCHEWAN		
Estevan CJSL 1280 AM		Sun. 7 am
Weyburn CJSL 1190 AM		Sun. 7 am

A **charitable** gift **annuity** offers:

REDEEMER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

- the peace of mind of a guaranteed lifetime income, largely tax free
- the satisfaction of knowing that you will be providing a future gift for Redeemer University College

Blended rate of 6 - 10% (capital returned & interest) for those over 65.
Please contact us for your own confidential, no-obligation quote.
Information available on other gift-planning options as well.

Christian Stewardship Services

Redeemer University College 777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, Ontario L9K 1J4
905-648-2139 ext. 4205 (Ben) stewardship@redeemer.on.ca

EUROPE & WORLDWIDE

DCA Travel & Cruise

Visit us at: www.dca-travel.com
info@dca-travel.com
TORONTO: 416-224-5211
1-800-667-2525
Canada wide - ticket home delivery!

TRAVEL INSURANCE - HEALTH/CANCELLATION/COMPREHENSIVE

MARTINAIR FROM CA $420 taxes CA $148

***WE ALSO BOOK* OAD and KRAS BUS TOURS**
Call for details

● ***SPECIAL OFFER***
21 DAY CRUISE on HOLLAND AMERICA'S ZUIDERDAM from Venice to Fort Lauderdale
19 October including air and cruise
from CA$2999.00
taxes CA$638

● **NORWEGIAN GEM**
19th October 7 night Western Mediterranean cruise from Barcelona Outside Cabin
from CA$799.00 taxes CA$136
Call for details

This is your Travel Centre for all your Travel Needs!!! On. Reg. [illegible]

News

U.S. religious life practices

New findings about U.S. religious life practices do not always line up as theologians may expect, a Pew Forum survey finds.

Jane Lampman

Religion is a vital force in the private and public lives of most Americans and helps mold the country's social and political attitudes, says the latest report from the US Religious Landscape Survey.

Religious freedom has given that vitality free rein. And for most, convictions are matters of personal choice and not necessarily from the tradition in which one was raised. The pathbreaking survey of a representative sample of 35,000 adults has revealed an unprecedented shifting of people among religious affiliations in recent decades. It also shows a remarkable diversity of beliefs and practices – within as well as across faiths.

"While there are important differences between religious traditions, affiliation, belief, and practice do not line up the way theologians might want them to line up," says John Green, senior fellow at Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, which carried out the survey.

Indeed, in a step that may unsettle orthodox believers but bodes well for pluralism, large majorities in nearly every tradition reject religious exclusivity and say that "many religions can lead to eternal life." Only 16 percent of Roman Catholics and 36 percent of Evangelicals, for example, say that "my religion is the one true faith" leading to salvation. Similarly, more than two-thirds of adults with a religious affiliation believe there's more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their own faith.

"Americans recognize that we do live in a much more complicated landscape than we used to," says Alan Wolfe, director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College.

The survey has been released in two stages. The first report, in February, documented the extraordinary switching among denominations, faiths, and a growing "unaffiliated" category. It also showed that Protestantism is close to losing its majority status in the United States. The second report, released Monday, details the beliefs and practices of people of all traditions – including world faiths and the unaffiliated – and analyzes their impact on social and political views.

"The unaffiliated have a diversity of belief that no one knew existed," says Mark Gray of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in Washington. For instance, 35 percent of them pray at least weekly, including 10 percent of atheists and 18 percent of agnostics.

On some basics, the American faithful are much alike. Ninety-two percent believe in God, including 70 percent of those not connected with any religion. Three-quarters believe in life after death, and 79 percent believe in miracles.

Prayer is a widespread practice, in which 75 percent engage at least weekly and 58 percent daily. Thirty-four percent say they have experienced or witnessed a divine healing of an illness or injury.

Yet divergent perspectives coexist within many traditions. In regard to the conception of God, 60 percent of Americans believe in a personal God, while 25 percent believe in an impersonal force or universal spirit. Eastern Orthodox Christians split 49 to 34 percent on this question, while Muslims divide evenly, 41 to 42 percent. Among Jews, 25 percent believe in a personal God and 50 percent in an impersonal force.

An aspect of practice that often spurs critiques about the depth of American faith relates to sacred texts. While believers hold their scriptures in high esteem – 63 percent call them the word of God – nearly half (45 percent) say they seldom or never read them outside of worship services. That rises to 57 percent for Catholics and 70 percent for Jews. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are the most avid scripture readers, followed by black Protestants and Evangelicals.

"Since our major religions are religions of the book, that's notable," says Professor Wolfe. "The religious revival in America isn't what you could call the old-time religion that has serious theological content or biblical knowledge."

Views differ also on whether the texts should be taken literally. Sixty percent of Evangelicals take the Bible as the literal word of God, while 23 percent of mainline Christians and 22 percent of Catholics do. Fifty percent of Muslims take the Koran literally. On the other hand, 67 percent of Buddhists, 53 percent of Jews, and 47 percent of Hindus say their scriptures are written by men, not God.

While Americans take their religion seriously (more than half say it is very important in their lives), it's not the first place they say they go when making moral choices or deciding on political views.

The survey finds that significant majorities in every tradition and among the unaffiliated agree that there are "absolute standards of right and wrong." When asked where they look for guidance, 52 percent say they count on practical experience and common sense, 29 percent cite religious teachings, and 9 percent point to reason or philosophy.

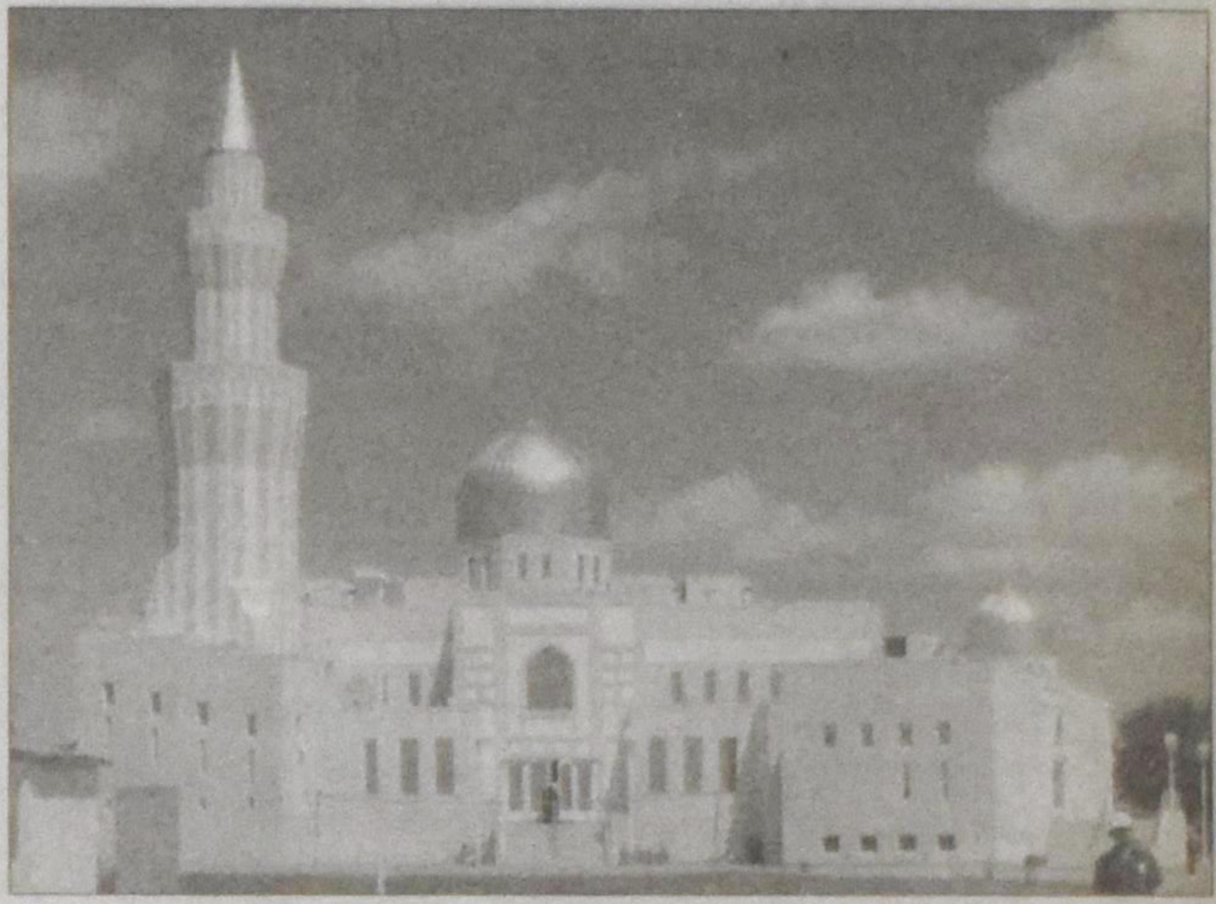
Similarly, relatively few say they look to religion as the primary source of their views on social and political issues. The survey found links, however, suggesting that religion may play more of a role, perhaps indirectly, than many recognize.

This is most visible with regard to political ideology, where those who are very active religiously tend to be more politically conservative than other Americans. Religion plays an obvious role on social issues such as abortion and homosexuality, yet it also shapes worldviews that affect attitudes on many issues.

The survey found widespread agreement across religious communities on the need for "more government support for the needy, even if it means going into debt."

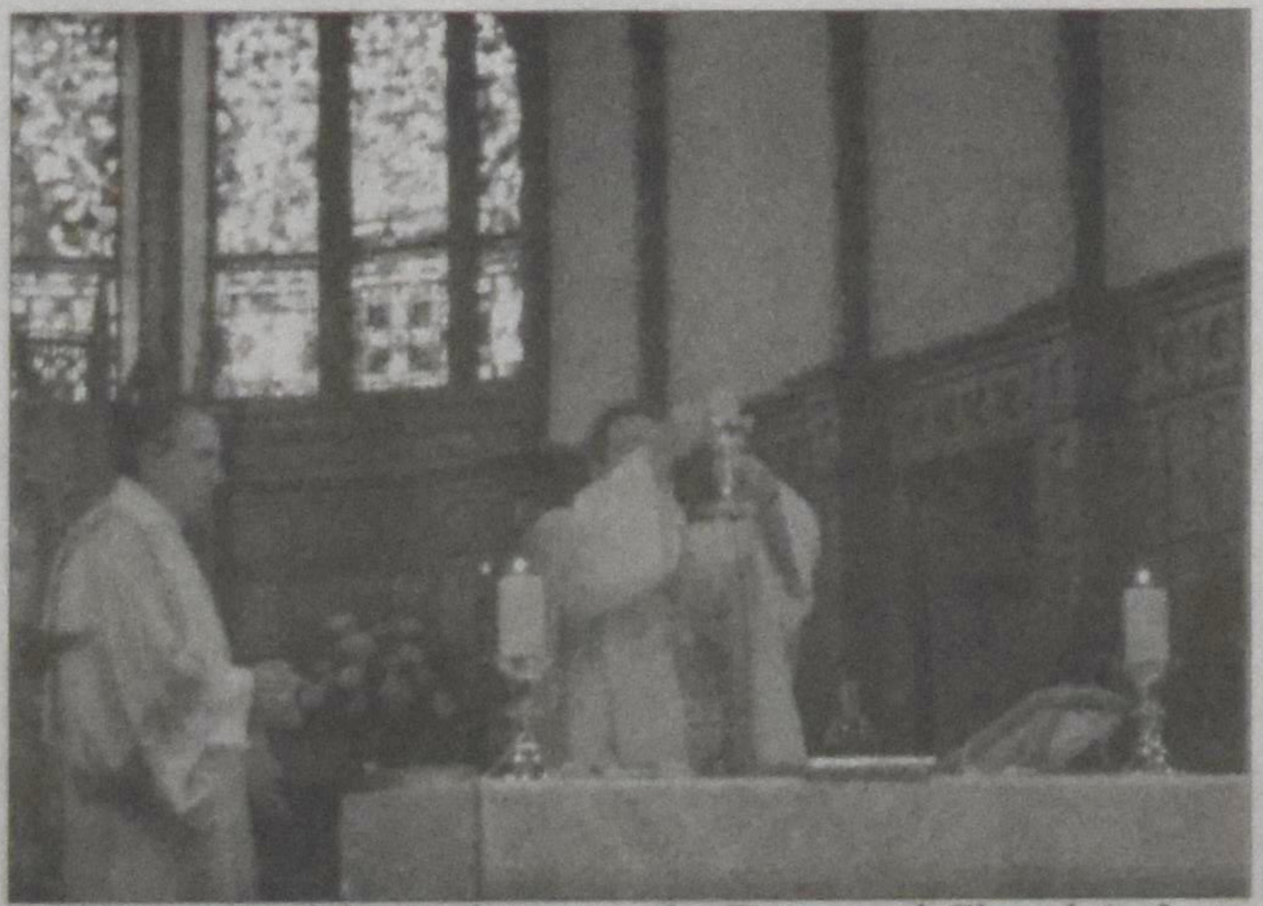
Environmental protection also gains widespread backing. Majorities in most groups also said good diplomacy rather than military strength was "the best way to ensure peace."

Jane Lampman is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor



Mosque in Maple, Ontario

At the Chua Bo De Buddhist Temple in New Orleans, a statue of Kuan Yin stands in the center of a lotus pond.



Celebration of the eucharist at the Episcopal Church in Long Island, NY.

At this Synagogue, Jews worship like the Levites, with singing and instruments. Man in forground carries the Torah.

Spiritual leader Paramukh Swami Maharaj watches youth perform a welcome dance at the Hindu temple in Lilburn, Georgia.